



## Positioning

*BQIS Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual's health and safety and to improving their quality of life. This document provides general information on the topic and is not intended to replace team assessment, decision-making, or medical advice. This Fact Sheet is one of ten regarding aspiration prevention.*

## Intended Outcomes

Readers will understand appropriate positioning techniques for people who receive oral and non-oral methods of nutrition and hydration as a means to prevent aspiration.

## Definitions

**Aspiration Pneumonia:** Aspiration pneumonia occurs when food, saliva, liquids, or vomit is breathed into the lungs or airways leading to the lungs.

**Left-side Lying:** A position of the body in which the individual is lying down on his/her left side.

**Positioning Schedule:** A written schedule for systematically turning and repositioning the individual.

**Prone:** A position of the body in which the individual is lying down with the face down.

**Reflux Aspiration:** Acid reflux is stomach acid coming up the esophagus from the stomach. The aspirate from the stomach can go back down the trachea and into the lungs causing aspiration pneumonia.

**Right-side Lying:** A position of the body in which the individual is lying down on his/her right side.

**Supine:** A position of the body in which the individual is lying down with the face up.

## Facts

- The risk of aspiration pneumonia increases as mobility and the ability to independently position oneself decreases.
- The person may benefit from being elevated (in upright position and/or with their head up), including when being changed, bathed, or in bed, and not just when eating or drinking.
- Lying flat at any time (including during personal care or dressing) increases the risk of reflux aspiration.



- All activities in which a person who is unable to position him/herself require specific position methods:
  - Toileting and undergarment changes
  - Dressing
  - Oral care
  - Medication administration
  - Bathing or showering
  - Sleeping
  - Eating, swallowing, and drinking, including those using a gastrostomy tube
  - Stomach emptying
  - Bowel and bladder elimination
- Positions may include:
  - Wheelchair or other mobility device
  - Left-side lying
  - Right-side lying
  - Prone on forearms
  - Supine
  - Standing or kneeling

### Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Identify positioning needs for all oral or non-oral activities through a comprehensive assessment with nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech therapy.
2. Develop and implement a positioning schedule for those individuals who are at an increased risk of aspiration and/or skin breakdown and require assistance to change positions, or have mobility impairments.
3. Generally accepted positions for oral activities:
  - a. Seated as upright as possible (meals, medication, and oral care)
  - b. Standing (medication and oral care)



- c. Elevated prone
  - Note: These positions are general in nature and must only be utilized upon completion of a comprehensive assessment by the individual's team.
4. Generally non-accepted positions for oral activities:
  - a. Sitting in a recliner
  - b. Lying in bed
5. Generally accepted positions for non-oral intake (gastrostomy tube):
  - a. Seated as upright as possible (meals, medication, and oral care)
  - b. Standing (medication and oral care)
  - c. Elevated right-side lying (with physician/physical therapist approval). Stomach empties more efficiently due to gravity in this position.
    - Note: These positions are general in nature and must only be utilized upon completion of a comprehensive assessment by the individual's team.
6. Generally non-accepted positions for non-oral intake:
  - a. Sitting in a recliner
  - b. Lying in bed
  - c. Left-side lying
7. Use positioning devices to assist with positioning as indicated:
  - a. Wedges
  - b. Hospital bed or elevated bed with bed blocks
  - c. Shower trolley
  - d. Tilt-in-space commode/shower chair
  - e. Custom-built wheelchairs



- Note: The use of these positioning devices is general in nature and must only be utilized according to directions from a qualified clinician following completion of a comprehensive assessment.

### Learning Assessment

The following questions can be used to verify a person's competency regarding the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. True or False: Supine position is when the person is lying on their stomach and their face is down.
2. True or False: If the person is dependent for all positioning changes, they do not need a positioning schedule.
3. True or False: All activities for someone unable to position themselves require specific positioning methods.
4. True or False: The risk of aspiration pneumonia increases as the person's ability to ambulate and reposition decreases.
5. Generally accepted positions for people who are receiving oral intake include:
  - A. Lying down
  - B. Sitting upright in a regular chair
  - C. Elevated prone
  - D. Both B and C



# HEALTH & SAFETY: ASPIRATION PREVENTION

## FACT SHEET

### References

Prevention of Aspiration. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Retrieved 06/15/15 from <http://www.aacn.org/wd/practice/content/practicealerts/aspiration-practice-alert.pcms?menu=practice>.

Effectiveness of an Aspiration Risk-Reduction Protocol. *Nursing Research* 2010 Jan–Feb; 59(1): 18–25. Retrieved 06/15/15 from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2875939/>.

### Related Resources

Aspiration Prevention Series Fact Sheets: *Food Texture and Fluid Consistency Modification, Management of Constipation, Management of Oral Health, Dysphagia, Modified Barium Swallow Study/Videofluoroscopy, Management of Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD), Management of Gastric Residuals, Feeding Tubes and Feeding/Medication Administration Options, and Choice Considerations Relevant to the Use of Enteral Nutrition*

*General Description of Diet Textures Handout*

These resources can be located on the BQIS Fact Sheet & Reminders webpage at: <http://www.in.gov/fssa/ddrs/3948.htm>.

### Learning Assessment Answers

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. D