

Reduced Alertness

When a person is drowsy or not fully alert, there is an increased risk of choking, or food, fluids, or oral medication being aspirated, which may lead to a chest infection.

Before offering food, fluids, or oral medications

Always ensure that the person:

- Is fully awake and alert
- Can open their eyes
- Can respond (e.g., verbally, with gestures, or by following simple instructions)
- Can maintain their alertness

Never offer food, fluids, or oral medication if the person is asleep or unable to stay awake.

During mealtimes

- Support the person to sit as upright as possible
- Offer small amounts at a slow pace
- Check regularly that the person remains awake and responsive
- **Stop** immediately if the person becomes drowsy or falls asleep
- Check that the person's mouth is clear after eating to ensure that no food remains inside the cheeks, on or under the tongue, or on the roof of the mouth

If alertness fluctuates

Some individuals may be unable to remain awake for long periods.

In these situations:

- Watch the person closely during eating and drinking, ensuring that they remain awake and alert
- Offer small amounts of food and fluids more frequently throughout the day
- Make the most of the periods when the person is most alert

Supporting nutrition and hydration

If the person is only managing small amounts of food and drink:

- Monitor their food and fluid intake
- Consider referral to the Dietetics Service
- Consider fortifying food and drink
- Discuss concerns regarding poor intake, weight loss, or dehydration with the person's medical team

Remember: Only offer food, fluids, and oral medications when the person is awake, alert, and able to respond. If in doubt, wait and try again later.