



Patient & Family Guide  
2020

# Drinking Water Between Meals

Aussi disponible en français :  
*Boire de l'eau entre les repas* (FF85-2196)



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# Drinking Water Between Meals

- Some people have problems swallowing thin liquids. This means that some liquids may go into their airway instead of their stomach. This is called aspiration. Aspiration is the word used when food or drink goes 'down the wrong way'.
- Not everyone coughs right away when food or liquid goes down the wrong way. This is called silent aspiration.
- Sometimes aspiration can increase the chance of getting pneumonia (lung infection). It can also be very unpleasant and cause coughing.
- It may be easier and safer for you to drink thick liquids. It may be hard to drink enough thick liquids to stay hydrated.
- To make sure you get enough liquids, you may be able to drink water between meals.
- Plain bottled water by itself may be less likely to cause problems than other thin liquids. This is because there is no sugar, fat, protein, or additives in the liquid. Bottled water is less likely to have bacteria in it than tap water.

## **People who are more likely to have lung complications:**

- Those who's health care provider has told them not to take anything by mouth (no food and drinks by mouth)
- Those with poor mouth health and/or a mouth infection
- Those who are not medically stable (very sick)
- Those who do not have good lung health
- Those with medically complex conditions
- Those who are impulsive
- Those who are immunocompromised (have a weak immune system). This includes people who are on medications that affect their immune system, have cancer, have had a transplant, have immune deficiency diseases (immune system not working properly), or have chronic inflammatory conditions.
- People with a degenerative neurological condition
- People who have had a spinal cord injury
- Those with a weak cough
- Those who have poor mobility (movement)

The Swallow Team has been helping you. They consider you to be a candidate for the Between Meal Water Protocol.

## **How do I know that drinking bottled water between meals is right for me?**

- You have been screened by the Swallow Team and they consider you to be a candidate.
- You are able to eat.
- You are not drowsy when eating and drinking.
- You are medically stable and have good lung health.
- You have good mouth health and do not have an active mouth infection.
- It is best if you can safely feed yourself.
- You and/or your family are able to understand and follow the guidelines.
- You and/or your family are able to understand the risks.
- You do not have distress (a lot of coughing and choking) when drinking water.

**We cannot be certain that water between meals is safe for you. There is still a chance that you could get pneumonia.**

## Follow these guidelines:

- **Brush your teeth and clean your mouth** after each meal or snack.
  - › You **must** have someone to give you good mouth care if you can't clean your own teeth. This helps to prevent harmful germs and food particles from going into your lungs.
- **Wait 30 minutes** after eating meals or snacks before taking sips of water.
- **Sit up** while drinking.
- **Take small sips of plain bottled water from a cup.**
  - › Do not drink from a bottle.
  - › Do not drink flavoured water or water with additives.
  - › You may use sterile bottled water in the hospital if other bottled water is not available.
- **Do not use ice** from the ice machine.
- **Do not use a straw** unless the Swallow Team tells you that it is OK.
- **Never take pills with water.** Take pills the way the Swallow Team showed you.

**Mouth care is important to lower your risk of pneumonia.**

## **Tips for good mouth care**

### **Natural teeth (no dentures):**

- Brush your teeth after each meal and before bedtime.
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush.
- Use a fluoride toothpaste.
- Don't rush the brush. Brush all surfaces of every tooth.
- Brush your tongue from back to front using long, sweeping strokes.
- Spit out toothpaste, but do not rinse with water to make sure the fluoride works best.
- Floss your teeth daily. It may help to use an F or Y-shaped flossing tool, or GUM® Soft-Picks®.

## **Dentures:**

- Remove your dentures and brush after each meal and before bedtime.
- Use a denture brush.
- Brush your tongue from back to front using long, sweeping strokes with a soft-bristled toothbrush.
- Rinse your mouth with water or alcohol-free mouthwash, if you are able. Swish and spit out all liquids.
- Soak your dentures overnight in denture cleaner.

**What are your questions?**

**Please ask. We are here to help you.**

## How much fluid do I need each day?

- How much fluid you need will depend on your age, activity, medications, and health. You may need to drink more fluids when you are more active, if you have a fever, or during hot weather.
- Urine (pee) colour is the best way to check for dehydration (not having enough fluids in your body). Your urine should be clear and pale yellow. You should be peeing as often as is normal for you.
- If your urine is dark, or you are not peeing as often as is normal for you, have more thickened fluids, water between meals, and/or foods with a high fluid content. Foods with a high fluid content include:
  - › pureéd fruit
  - › thickened, blended soups
  - › hot cereals
  - › puddings
  - › yogurt
- Try for \_\_\_\_\_ of plain bottled water between meals each day to help meet your fluid needs.



**Call your primary health care provider or 811, or go to the nearest Emergency Department if you have:**

- › fever
- › shortness of breath
- › more chest congestion
- › more coughing during or after meals
- › extreme (very strong) thirst
- › no peeing for 8 to 12 hours
- › moderate diarrhea (loose, watery poop) for 5 or more days
- › severe (very bad) diarrhea for 2 or more days
- › vomiting (throwing up) for more than 12 to 24 hours
- › confusion or more drowsiness
- › seizure
- › uncontrolled high blood sugar



Dietitian: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Speech Language Pathologist:

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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*Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

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*Prepared by: Nutrition and Food Services*

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If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.