From Dr. Escudé...

The Respiratory System and Reflux

Aspiration of food or drink into the lungs can occur during swallowing or afterward when the material is refluxed back up. Aspiration should be considered in the differential whenever these are present:

- Recurrent episodes of pneumonia- can be due to recurrent aspiration of refluxed gastric material
- Asthma- can be due to irritation of the respiratory system from stomach contents
- Reactive airway disease or wheezing- can be due to irritation of the respiratory system from stomach contents
- Posterior dental erosions- can be due to acid damage

In addition to the usual signs of GERD, people who have a limited ability to communicate verbally may exhibit behaviors that are not easily recognizable as signs of gastrointestinal upset. Some behaviors that one might see that could indicate discomfort from GERD or other GI conditions are:

- Hand mouthing - people may reach for the pain or may try to stimulate salivation to help wash down the acidic reflux
- Sucking on a sock or other object to stimulate swallowing and salivation
- Pica- eating non-food items in an attempt to wash down the reflux as with hand mouthing
- Food refusal- if a person learns that it will be uncomfortable during or after eating, they may try to avoid it
- Coughing when lying down due to reflux
- Physical or verbal aggression particularly around meal times in an effort to avoid eating
- Distress in the middle of the night due to reflux when lying down

Thanks for your careful attention to helping improve the lives of people we support.
Craig Escudé, MD, FAAFP
President
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Dr. Escudé has dedicated his career to providing healthcare for people with IDD and other vulnerable populations and teaches on the subject throughout the country.