



Parkinson's Mealtime Safety Checklist for Staff

A Quick Guide for Assisted Living and Long-Term Care Teams

Parkinson's disease can affect the muscles used for **chewing and swallowing**, which increases the risk of choking and aspiration. Safe mealtime support helps residents maintain nutrition, dignity, and safety.

This checklist provides simple steps staff can follow before, during, and after meals.

Before the Meal

- ✓ Ensure the resident is **fully awake and alert**
 - ✓ Position the resident **sitting upright (90° if possible)**
 - ✓ Confirm the **correct diet texture and liquid consistency**
 - ✓ Check that **Parkinson's medications were given on time**
Medication timing can affect swallowing ability.
 - ✓ Ensure **glasses, hearing aids, and dentures** are in place if used
 - ✓ Create a **calm eating environment** with minimal distractions
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During the Meal

- ✓ Encourage **small bites and small sips**
- ✓ Allow **extra time for chewing and swallowing**
- ✓ Watch for signs of swallowing difficulty:
 - Coughing or choking
 - Throat clearing
 - Wet or gurgling voice

- Food remaining in the mouth
 - Drooling or difficulty managing saliva
 - ✓ Encourage residents to **finish swallowing before the next bite**
 - ✓ Avoid rushing the resident
 - ✓ If fatigue develops, **offer breaks during the meal**
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If a Resident Begins to Choke

- ✓ Encourage coughing if the resident can cough effectively
 - ✓ Follow **facility choking response protocols**
 - ✓ Alert nursing staff immediately
 - ✓ Stop food or liquids until the resident is safe
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After the Meal

- ✓ Keep the resident **sitting upright for at least 30 minutes**
 - ✓ Check the mouth for **pocketed food**
 - ✓ Monitor for **coughing, breathing changes, or fatigue**
 - ✓ Report any swallowing concerns to nursing staff
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Warning Signs to Report

Notify nursing staff if you observe:

- Frequent coughing or choking during meals
- Wet or gurgling voice after swallowing
- Difficulty swallowing medications
- Food remaining in the mouth
- Recurrent chest infections or pneumonia
- Unexplained weight loss
- Sudden decline in eating ability

Early intervention can prevent complications.

Important Reminder About Parkinson's Medication Timing

Swallowing ability may worsen during “**OFF periods**”, when Parkinson's medications wear off.

Parkinson's medications should generally be given **within 15 minutes of the scheduled time** to maintain symptom control and support safe swallowing.

If staff notice **swallowing difficulty occurring at certain times of day**, notify nursing staff so the provider can evaluate medication timing.

Supporting Residents With Parkinson's

With proper support, individuals living with Parkinson's can continue to eat safely and maintain good nutrition.

Staff play an important role in:

- Creating a calm, supportive mealtime environment
 - Watching for swallowing changes
 - Allowing adequate time for meals
 - Reporting concerns early
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Wisconsin Parkinson Association

The **Wisconsin Parkinson Association (WPA)** provides education, resources, and training materials for healthcare professionals and care facilities supporting individuals living with Parkinson's.

Learn more at:

wiparkinson.org

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