Guidelines to Help Prevent Pneumonia After a Stroke

One of the possible complications after a stroke is pneumonia. Here are some tips to help prevent this from happening to you. Our goal is to maintain your health and keep you out of the hospital!

• Follow the guidelines set up for you by your physical and occupational therapists.

• Get out of bed each day and stay up as much as possible.

• Get as much exercise as you can. Exercising your body helps to exercise your lungs.

• If you are not able to exercise regularly, take deep breaths and cough – try to do this every two hours while awake. Sit in an upright position to expand your lungs well.

• If you are not yet able to move well, ask your caregivers to help you change positions often to help drain and clear your lungs. Do not lie in one position for more than two hours.

• Use any breathing medications and devices you were given (such as an incentive spirometer). Follow the directions exactly to help your breathing muscles stay strong.

• Follow all instructions for eating and swallowing set up for you by your speech therapist. One type of pneumonia can be caused by food getting into your lungs.

• Drink plenty of fluids unless your doctor tells you otherwise. This helps your lungs to clean themselves and helps keep any phlegm from becoming thick and sticky.

• Practice good oral hygiene to keep your mouth clean. Bacteria in your mouth can get into your lungs and cause pneumonia. See the dentist every six months.

• Be sure you are up to date with your flu and pneumonia vaccinations.

• If you are still smoking, get help to quit. Ask your doctor, nurse or therapist for information. Smoking greatly increases your risk of pneumonia.

Call your doctor if you:
• Have a cough with a fever
• Are short of breath
• Are coughing up phlegm from your lungs that is more than normal, or if the phlegm changed color.
• Notice any changes in your ability to swallow or cough effectively.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.