

Safe Straw Might Help You Swallow Through Thick and Thin

Mary Spremulli, MA, CCC-SLP

Aspiration, food or liquid getting misdirected into the airway can be a source of aspiration pneumonia, and result in a hospitalization and recommendation for altering the diet, which often includes thickening liquids.

Thickened liquids, no matter what formula to get there, are not often enjoyed by patients, and many individuals, once out of the hospital or rehab, do not adhere to the recommendation to drink thickened liquids, and resume thin liquids on their own.

The ability to resume thin liquids once recovered from an aspiration pneumonia may be a very doable goal for people who are mobile, have a strong and effective cough, and are generally in a good state of state of health, despite a diagnosis they might have of Parkinson's or other neurological disorder.

But for others, who are wheelchair- or bed-bound, need to be fed by someone else, and have a weak voice and weak cough, their risk for another aspiration pneumonia is greater. "But it's only water," the patient or caregiver might say. True, small amounts of water getting misdirected into the airway will probably be of minor consequence to the lungs, but bacteria that resides in the mouth gets carried along with the water, and it's often the oral bacteria that finds its way into the lungs that contributes to infection.

Controlling the amount of liquid that is swallowed can sometimes make a big difference in swallowing safety, and the difference between thin or thick liquids.

The "small sip" that might be recommended by the swallowing therapist, can be hard to judge by the patient. So, enter, the Bionix Safe Straw.[™]

The Safe Straw[™] is a clever little invention that controls the amount of liquid that can be taken at a time. A regular straw is placed in a chamber of liquid. One teaspoon of liquid is drawn up the straw, and the float in the host chamber floats back to the bottom, creating a nice little "pause," as you prepare for your next sip.

"... a sip through a Safe Straw might be a great solution for 'getting started' with the swallow."

Straws have often been on the list of things not to use when drinking, but, with the volume controlled, the Safe Straw[™] might be the perfect way for many people to keep drinking liquids safely. For people who tend to "hold" food or liquid in their mouth or can't quite coordinate the tongue to give the push it needs to the liquid, a sip through a Safe Straw[™] might be a great solution for "getting started" with the swallow.

The Safe Straw[™] chamber is available for thin or nectar thick liquids, and is reusable for a single person. Having used it recently with a few patients, I would judge this a worthwhile investment. Ask your speech/swallowing therapist for more information, or visit the company website: www.bionixmed.com/MED_Pages/SafeStraw.html ■



Safe Straw

Mary Spremulli, MA, CCC-SLP, a medical speech pathologist and licensed nurse, with more than 25 years of health care experience, frequently posts articles at <http://voiceaerobicsdvd.blogspot.com>. She is also president of Voice Aerobics, LLC, a speech-language pathology private practice located in Southwest Florida.