

Healthy Outcomes

Fall 2026 Quarterly Newsletter



Thank you, Direct Support Professionals, for being a steady advocate!

Your willingness to speak up—especially when something does not feel right—makes a real difference in the health, dignity, and safety of the people you support. The adults and families you work with are better cared for because of your persistence, clinical judgment, and commitment to doing what is right.



WHY DO PEOPLE EAT TOO FAST?

UNDERSTANDING THE HIDDEN RISKS OF RAPID EATING

We all know someone who eats quickly. For some individuals with intellectual disabilities or autism, rapid eating can be more than a habit. It can increase the risk of choking and make mealtimes less safe. Research and caregiver observations have identified behaviors such as food cramming, increased mealtime support needs, and coughing during meals as concerns associated with feeding and swallowing difficulties in adults with intellectual disabilities.

Rapid eating looks different from person to person. Some individuals take very large bites. Others may put more food in their mouth before they have finished chewing and swallowing what is already there. Some may eat so quickly that they appear anxious to finish the meal. Understanding why a person eats quickly can help caregivers provide the right support.

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Thank you, DSPs!

Why do people eat too fast?

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Choking prevention on the go

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Visual Storyboard

WHY MIGHT SOMEONE EAT TOO FAST?

There is rarely just one reason.

Some individuals enjoy strong sensory experiences and may prefer the taste, texture, or feeling of food in their mouth. Others may experience anxiety that leads them to rush through meals.

Past experiences can also play a role. Individuals who have experienced food insecurity or limited access to food in the past may eat quickly because they worry food will not be available later.

Certain medications, medical conditions, or cognitive challenges may affect a person's awareness of bite size, chewing, and pacing during meals.

In some cases, rapid eating has become a long-standing habit that has never been addressed or supported in a structured way.

WHAT SHOULD DSP'S WATCH FOR?

Watch for individuals who:

- take very large bites.
- add more food before swallowing.
- put too much food in their mouth at once.
- finish meals much faster than usual.
- become upset when encouraged to slow down.
- cough, choke, or gag while eating.
- have food left in their mouth after trying to swallow.
- need frequent reminders to take smaller bites.

The Bottom Line:

Rapid eating is often viewed as a behavior issue, but it may be communicating something important. By understanding why a person eats quickly and observing changes in eating habits, DSPs can help reduce choking risks and support safer, more enjoyable mealtimes.

Follow the support plan. Document and report concerns. Notify the nurse or healthcare professional of changes. For choking, follow emergency procedures and call 911.

SIMPLE WAYS TO PROMOTE SAFER EATING

The goal is not to criticize or control a person's eating. Instead, caregivers can help create an environment that supports safer mealtime habits.

Helpful strategies may include:

- Encouraging smaller bites
- Offering reminders to slow down
- Providing food in smaller portions when appropriate
- Limiting distractions during meals
- Allowing enough time to eat without feeling rushed
- Following the individual's support plan and recommendations from nursing, speech therapy, or other healthcare professionals [Learn more](#)
- **Safety Resource:** [Choking- A Medical Emergency](#)





SAFER TRAVEL: STOP BEFORE EATING

Eating in a moving vehicle increases choking risk and can delay help. Offer meals and snacks only when the vehicle is safely stopped.

Pennsylvania's Office of Developmental Programs warns that a driver may not notice choking right away and cannot safely help until the vehicle is stopped and the person can be reached. The alert recommends **not eating in a moving vehicle**.

[ODP Health Alert: Choking on the Road](#)

PLAN AHEAD

Plan stops: Schedule meal and snack breaks.

Stop before eating: Choose a safe place where support can be provided.

Follow the support plan: Review supervision and choking precautions.

Pack safely: Bring the correct food textures and drink thicknesses.

Allow time: Do not rush the person while eating.

QUICK TIP

When planning a trip, ask yourself: Can this meal or snack wait until we are safely parked?

If the answer is yes, consider making a meal break part of the travel plan.

TRAINING, TOOLS, AND UPDATES

HCQU TRAINING CALENDAR

Quick Reminder

Check the website often for updates and training
Registration is optional

Register only if you want a calendar invitation and confirmation email

To attend the training, simply click **JOIN** at the scheduled time

✓ HCQU trainings can help you meet annual DSP training requirements

- **Improving HRST Diagnoses and Medication Notes**

| 10.1.2026 | 10:00 AM [Join](#)

- **Expanding the Support Toolbox for Individuals with IDD & Autism** | 10.8.2026 | 10:00 - 11:00 AM [Join](#)

- **Weis Virtual Cook Along: Building a Healthy Plate** | 10.8.2026 | 1:00 - 2:00 PM [Join](#)

- **Online Safety - Be Smart** | 10.15.2026 | 12:00 - 12:30 PM [Join](#)

- **Expanding the Support Toolbox for Individuals with IDD & Autism** | 10.20.2026 | 10:00 - 11:00 AM [Join](#)

- **Aging and Cerebral Palsy** | 10.29.2026 | 10:00 - 11:00 AM [Join](#)

- **Dementia Friends Information Session** | 11.4.2026 | 10:00 - 11:15 AM [Join](#)

- **Sepsis Awareness** | 11.5.2026 | 1:00 - 2:00 PM [Join](#)

- **The Skinny on Skin** | 11.17.2026 | 10:00 - 11:15 AM [Join](#)

- **Weis Virtual Cook Along: Skills for Meal Preparation** | 12.9.2026 | 10:00 - 11:00 AM [Join](#)

Need a Training?

Submit an [HCQU Referral Request Form](#)

Email: HCQU@geisinger.edu

Learn more: www.geisinger.edu/hcqu

NEW TRAINING SERIES COMING SOON!

Navigating Relationships and Personal Safety

A new HCQU training series begins this **November** for **self-advocates and Direct Support Professionals**.

Guest speaker

Practical tips and tools for support staff and individuals

Quick 30-minute sessions

New topics through 2027

Build confidence, strengthen self-advocacy skills, and learn strategies to support healthy and safe relationships

STAY INFORMED ABOUT MEASLES IN PA

Measles cases continue to be reported across the country. Visit the [PA Department of Health's measles webpage](#) for:

Pennsylvania measles dashboard and case updates

Symptoms, transmission, and prevention information

MMR vaccine guidance and vaccine locations

Resources for families, schools, healthcare providers, and community partners

TRAINING AVAILABLE FROM THE HCQU:

- Signs and symptoms of measles
- How measles spread
- Prevention strategies
- Vaccination information
- Infection control practices

NEED HELP NAVIGATING IDD AND AUTISM SERVICES?

The free Spring 2026 Gold Book can help you understand Pennsylvania services for people with intellectual disabilities and autism. It explains who may qualify, what help is available, and how to find services and community supports.

- [Gold Book-English](#)
- [Gold Book- Spanish](#)

NEW FREE HCQU ONLINE COURSE!

Would You Know What to Do During a Seizure?

Learn how to recognize different types of seizures, provide seizure first aid, know when to call 911, and document what you observe. This free, self-paced course is designed for families, self-advocates, and supporters and can be completed on any device. [Available Courses](#)

Start the free course:

[Seizures and Epilepsy: What you need to know](#)



Move Your Way[®], Every Day!

Being active helps you stay healthy, feel strong, and have fun. Moving your body can help with strength, balance, energy, and feeling good. Choose activities that you enjoy and can do safely.

Move Your Way encourages everyone to find ways to be active. You can take a walk outside, join an exercise class, or dance to your favorite music at home. Every movement counts!

Looking for a fun way to be active? Try [Special Olympics Pennsylvania](#). Special Olympics offers sports all year long. People of all ability levels are welcome to participate.

Being active can help your body and mind. Community activities, exercise programs, and Special Olympics can help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities make friends, learn new skills, feel proud, and be part of their community.

Pumpkin Fluff Dip

[Allrecipes](#)

This pumpkin fluff dip recipe is creamy, fluffy, and delicious. It's flavored with pumpkin pie spice, and delicious served with apple slices and graham crackers – especially cinnamon graham.

Ingredients

- 1 (15-ounce) can solid pack pumpkin
- 1 (5-ounce) package instant vanilla pudding mix
- 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- 1 (16-ounce) container frozen whipped topping, thawed

Directions

1. Mix pumpkin, pudding mix, and pumpkin pie spice together in a large bowl.
2. Fold in whipped topping.
3. Cover and chill until ready to serve.



Make Fall Fun and Interactive!

Cooking together can build confidence, independence, communication, and life skills. Encourage individuals with IDD and Autism to help gather ingredients, measure, mix, and serve. Use the visual storyboard to support learning and participation. Focus on each person's abilities, offer choices, and celebrate every contribution while enjoying a seasonal treat together.



[Printable
Pumpkin Fluff
Dip Recipe
Visual Story
Board](#)

Safety & Support Reminder: Closely supervise all food preparation activities. Consider each person's allergies, dietary restrictions, and any swallowing or safety concerns.

Connect with the Central PA HCQU

Our RN team provides health education, training, and technical assistance for individuals, families, and providers.

- **Website:** [\[www.geisinger.edu/hcqu\]](http://www.geisinger.edu/hcqu)
- **Request services:** [\[Central PA HCQU Referral Form\]](#)
- **Call:** 570-271-5935
- **Email:** HCQU@geisinger.edu

Updated Program Director Contact: Cheryl Hawkins, RN clhawkins@geisinger.edu