

# NEWS

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS  
(SOUTHWESTERN)  
MEDICAL SCHOOL AT DALLAS



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DALLAS--If you are an expectant mother on your way to the hospital and are struck by yet another pain--hunger--please resist. Your life may depend on it.

From five to eight per cent of all maternal deaths are caused by aspiration--vomiting into one's own lungs--says Dr. A.H. Giesecke, professor of anesthesiology at The University of Texas (Southwestern) Medical School at Dallas.

This unlovely situation can happen when protective reflexes of the throat are dulled by anesthesia, allowing fluid and food particles from the stomach to get into the lungs when vomiting takes place.

"You drown," says Dr. Giesecke, "in a acid fluid."

Of course, the process is not restricted to maternity cases. It can happen in accidental injury or surgical situations, anytime anyone is unconscious with food in their stomach. Liquor and drugs have played a role in aspiration deaths.

The aspiration problem was recently brought into focus by a television advertisement showing a woman stopping at a franchise restaurant on her way to the maternity ward, says Dr. Giesecke.

The Dallas doctor quietly organized support by various professional societies in obstetrics and anesthesiology and at their request, the ad was retired.

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In other situations, Dr. Giesecke said, women on their way to the hospital have been told by friends, "You'd better grab a bite now--they won't feed you when you get there."

"When you go into labor or suspect it may start from other signs," advises the doctor, "don't eat." Of course, anesthesia may not be needed, or may be used sparingly in the delivery. But if the doctor suddenly calls for anesthesia, there usually isn't time for making sure the stomach is empty, he said.

Many persons do survive aspiration incidents, he said. But there are real problems from the burns caused in the lungs by stomach acids and by solid particles. An associate at the medical school has found cases of pulmonary fibrosis in a followup of survivors.

New techniques of therapy in aspiration accidents include steroids like cortisone for keeping down inflammation and antibiotics.

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