



## Be safe from choking



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**C**hoking can be a very scary situation. The best way to stop your child from choking is to prevent it. Be aware of foods that can cause choking and try to avoid them. Round, firm, foods are common choking dangers. Infants and young children do not grind or chew their food well and may try to swallow it whole. Children are not able to grind or chew their food until about four years of age. The following foods can be choking dangers:

- Hot dogs
- Nuts and seeds
- Chunks of meat and cheese
- Whole grapes
- Hard, gooey, or sticky candy
- Popcorn
- Chunks of peanut butter
- Raw vegetables and chunks of fruit
- Chewing gum

### Ways to reduce the risk of choking

#### ✓ Stay with a child while they eat

Young children are still learning how to chew their food. If they choke, they might not be able to make enough noise to get your attention. It's always good to stay close!

#### ✓ Take it one bite at a time

Children often stuff their mouth full of foods. This increases their risk of choking. If your child tends to be a mouth stuffer, offer only a few pieces of food at a time. Remind children to take small bites, eat slow and chew their food well.

#### ✓ Eat in place

There should be no moving around during meals or snacks. Young children should sit at the table while they eat. Walking, running, lying down and moving all increase the risk of choking.

#### ✓ Serve the right size

Some foods, like whole grapes are the size that will block a child's airway. Other foods that are hard or

tough to chew may be swallowed whole. Cut foods into small pieces before serving. For example, grapes should be cut in half.

Hot dogs must be sliced lengthwise before cutting into smaller pieces. All foods that can be cut should be smaller than the circles illustrated below. Foods that cannot be cut into smaller pieces should not be offered, especially hard and round candies.

**Infant (6 to 12 months): about ¼-inch wide**



**5-year-old child: about ½-inch wide**



#### ✓ Soften up the situation

Steaming, boiling, pureeing and mashing will make hard foods easier to chew and swallow. These include fresh fruits, carrots, cauliflower, broccoli, pasta and even rice.



#### ✓ Avoid sticky situations

Sticky foods can stick to the top of the mouth or back of the throat and block the airway. These foods include marshmallows, gummy bears, chunks of cheese, chewing gum and chunks of peanut butter. Cut these foods into small pieces. Peanut butter can be thinned with mashed bananas or milk.

#### ✓ Knowing what choking looks like

People are not able to talk or make sounds when they are choking. If your child can talk, cry or cough loudly, then they are probably not choking. Stay close and let their natural gag reflexes dislodge the food.

#### Signs that a child might be choking

- He or she is unable to talk or make noise
- His or her lips are turning blue
- He or she is losing consciousness

If any of these start to happen, ask someone to call for emergency help. Place your fist on their abdomen between their belly button and rib cage. Quickly push your fist upward as if you are trying to push the food out. Teach children to gently grab their neck if they are choking. This is the widely recognized sign to tell others that you are choking and need help.

## ✓ **Be ready**

You never know when a child will choke, even if you have taken all the precautions. Take a CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) class if you have a chance. What you learn might save a life!

**Reviewed by: Jenni Kinsey, MS, RD, LD & Hasina Rakotomanana, MS.**

### **References:**

American Academy of Pediatrics (2010). Choking Prevention. Retrieved from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/125/3/601>