

Choking Prevention

Babies and young children are at the highest risk of choking on food and remain at high risk until they can chew better. Choking kills more young children than any other home accident.

What are some common foods that may cause choking and should not be fed to infants & toddlers?

• Firm, smooth, or slippery foods that slide down the throat before chewing, such as:

- hot dogs, sausages, or toddler hot dogs (even when cut in round slices)
- peanuts and other nuts
- hard candy, jelly beans
- whole beans
- whole grapes, berries, cherries, melon balls, or cherry and grape tomatoes
- whole pieces of canned fruit

• Small, dry, or hard foods that are difficult to chew and easy to swallow whole, such as:

- popcorn
- peanuts, nuts and seeds (like sunflower or pumpkin seeds)
- plain wheat germ
- whole grain kernels (like rice, wheat berries)
- small pieces of raw carrots or other raw or partially cooked hard vegetables or fruits
- pretzels
- potato and corn chips

• Sticky or tough foods that do not break apart easily and are hard to remove from the airway, such as:

- large spoonfuls/chunks of peanut butter or other nut or seed butters
- raisins and other dried fruit
- tough meat or large chunks of meat
- marshmallows
- chewing gum
- caramels or other chewy candy.

Food preparation techniques to lower choking risk

You can lower a baby's risk of choking on food by taking the proper precautions.

When preparing food for babies, make sure it is in a form that does not require much chewing. The following preventative preparation techniques are recommended:

- Cook foods until soft enough to easily pierce with a fork.
- Cut soft foods into small pieces (cubes of food no larger than 1/4 inch) or thin slices that can easily be chewed.
- Cut soft round foods, such as cooked carrots or celery into short strips rather than round pieces.
- Substitute foods that may cause choking with a safe substitute, such as thinly sliced meat or hamburger instead of hot dogs.
- Remove all bones from poultry, meat, & fish.
- Cut grapes, cherries, melon balls, and cherry tomatoes into quarters.
- Remove pits and seeds from very ripe fruit and cut the fruit into small pieces.
- Grind or mash and moisten food for young babies.
- Cook and finely grind or mash whole grain kernels of wheat, barley, rice, etc. before feeding to a baby. Do not feed babies raw or cooked whole grain kernels in the whole form.
- Cut string cheese lengthwise before cutting into 1/4 inch pieces.
- Cut raw fruits and vegetables into strips first & then into 1/4 inch pieces.

Remember, choking can occur anywhere and anytime there is food. Avoid those foods known to be a risk or modify them to make them safer. Closely supervise mealtimes and encourage babies to eat their meals sitting quietly. Meals can continue to be both a happy time and a safe time.

1/4" - pieces

