

Choking

Choking happens when a small object, toy or food blocks the airway. Babies and young children have very small airways. This makes it easier for them to choke.

Common causes of choking

- Trying to swallow large pieces of poorly chewed food. A toddler's mouth muscles are not developed enough to chew hard or slippery foods. A toddler does not have back teeth to grind up hard food, and it can slide back into her throat before it is chewed all the way.
- Walking, playing or running with food or objects in the mouth.
- Some soft foods, such as hot dogs, sausages and grapes, can cause choking because they are the right shape for blocking a child's airway.
- Thick and sticky foods, like peanut butter, can line the back of the throat and build up so a child cannot clear his throat.

Foods that cause choking

- Hot dogs, sausages
- Hard fruit with peels, such as crisp apples
- Raw carrots and other firm or tough raw vegetables
- Chunks of peanut butter



- Candy
- Popcorn
- Nuts
- Chips (potato, corn, tortilla)
- Grapes
- Chunks of meat or cheese
- Marshmallows

What you can do

- Cut food into bite-size pieces. Slice grapes and hot dogs lengthwise.
- Cook, mash or grate hard foods.
- Steam vegetables.
- Serve babies small amounts of food at a time. Be sure the mouth is clear before giving another bite or spoonful of food.
- Cook food such as beans, pasta and rice until soft.
- If your baby is teething, use a teething ring, not food. Even a baby with no teeth can break off chunks of food and choke.
- Have your child sit in a high chair or at the table when eating.
- Always watch your child when she eats. Teach her to sit down and eat slowly.
- Don't feed your child when she is laughing or crying.

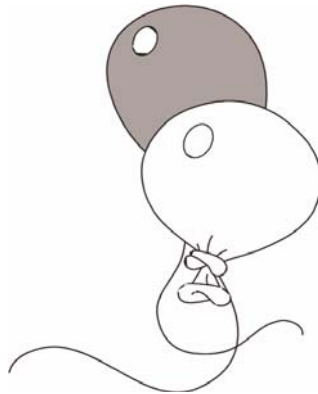
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What you can do, continued

- Turn off the TV, computer, video games, etc. during meals and snack times.
- Avoid eating in the car. If your child starts to choke, it can be hard to safely pull over fast enough.

Other choking risks

- Check toys and games for small parts that could be pulled off. Remove loose parts, such as eyes and buttons from dolls, wheels from cars and loose screws.
- Throw away broken toys, games and crayons.
- Keep small items away from babies and young children (coins, marbles, magnets, tiny hair clips and pen or marker caps). If an item can fit inside of a toilet paper tube it is too small.
- Keep your purse, sewing basket and toolkit in a safe place.
- Choose Mylar balloons. Latex balloons are a choking risk to children of all ages.



Be prepared

- Learn first aid, CPR, infant choking rescue and the Heimlich maneuver (for children).
- Post first aid instructions for choking in your home.

Call 911 if your child:

- Is choking or struggling to breathe
- Can't cough, cry or make any noise
- Has blue lips, has passed out or is limp

If you or someone else treated your child with the Heimlich maneuver, take him to see a health care provider right away. It is important to check for any items that might have been breathed into the lungs.

Adapted from "Preventing Choking on Food by Children: Safe Practice Guidelines for Child Care Facilities," with permission by Public Health-Seattle King County.