

Supplement A: Practice Choking Prevention

CHOKING!

Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program



Children under 4 years of age are at the greatest risk of choking.

Almost 90 percent of children who die from choking are **under the age of 4**. Young children are still learning how to chew properly, and they often swallow things whole. Young children also like to put things in their mouths, but their small airways can become easily blocked. Nearly any food can cause choking in children. It is important to make sure that food is served in the appropriate sizes, shapes, and textures to reduce the risk of choking. Always supervise children during eating time.

What type of foods pose choking risks?

Some foods are easy for young children to choke on when swallowing because they are the same size and shape as a child's airway. For example, peanuts may block the lower airway. A chunk of hot dog or a whole grape may completely block the upper airway. Avoid serving foods that are as wide around as a nickel, which is about the size of a young child's throat. Foods likely to cause choking come in many shapes, sizes, and textures.

Child care providers should not offer to **children under 4 years of age** foods that pose the highest risk for choking. These include foods that are round, tube-shaped, small, hard, thick and sticky, smooth, slippery, or easily molded to stick to the airway. Prevent choking by avoiding these foods or by changing their shape, size, and texture before offering them to children during meals and snacks.

What are some common foods that may cause choking and should not be fed to young children under age 4?

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

- Whole grapes, cherries, berries, melon balls, or cherry and grape tomatoes
- Whole pieces of canned fruit
- Hot dog-shaped foods, including sausages, meat sticks, cheese sticks, or toddler hot dogs (even when cut into round slices)



- Peanuts and nuts
- Whole beans
- Hard or round candy, jelly beans

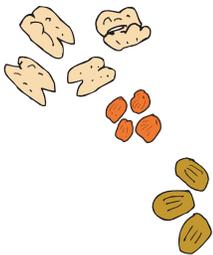
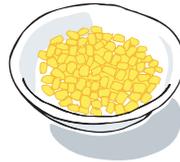
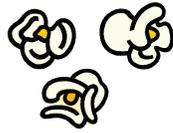


more 'foods that cause choking' on next page ...

... more 'foods that cause choking'

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

- Popcorn
- Hard pretzels
- Potato and corn chips, or other similar snack foods
- Small pieces of raw vegetable (like raw carrot rounds, baby carrots, string beans, or celery), or other raw or partially cooked hard vegetables
- Apples or other hard pieces of raw fruit, especially those with hard pits or seeds
- Cooked or raw whole-kernel corn
- Raw green peas
- Peanuts, nuts, and seeds (like sunflower or pumpkin seeds)



- Plain wheat germ
- Whole-grain kernels (like rice, wheat berries)
- Crackers or breads with seeds, nut pieces, or whole-grain kernels

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

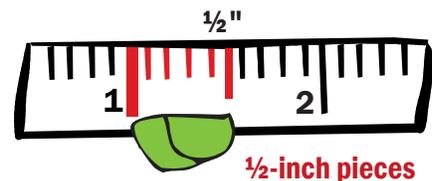
- Chunks or spoonfuls of peanut butter or nut and seed butters
- Large, hard pieces of uncooked dried fruits or vegetables
- Tough meat or large chunks of meat
- Large chunks of cheese, especially string cheese
- Fish with bones
- Marshmallows
- Chewing gum
- Chewy fruit snacks
- Caramels, gum drops, and gummy candies, or other gooey or sticky candy



How can I serve table foods so they are easy for young children to chew?

You can help reduce the risks of choking on some foods by changing their shape, size, or texture, and by serving certain foods in small, manageable bites. Offer 2- to 4-year-olds the same variety of foods as the rest of the children in your care, but prepared in forms that are easy for them to chew and swallow. Use these simple tips to make these foods safe options for 2- to 4-year-old children.

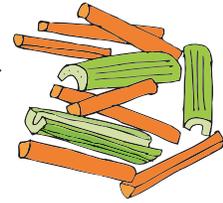
- ▶ **Cook foods until soft enough** to pierce easily with a fork.
- ▶ **Cut soft food into thin slices or small pieces**—no larger than one-half inch ($\frac{1}{2}$ "). Cut soft, round foods, like hot dogs or string cheese, into short strips rather than round pieces.
- ▶ **Remove all bones** from fish, chicken, and meat before cooking.



more 'serving table foods' tips on next page ...

... more 'serving table foods' tips

- ▶ **Grind up meat**, chicken, and other tough foods.
- ▶ **Cook foods, such as carrots and celery**, until slightly soft. Then, cut into sticks.
- ▶ **Mash or purée food** until it is soft.
- ▶ **Remove seeds** and hard pits from fruit.
- ▶ **Cut grapes, cherries, berries, or melon balls in half lengthwise**, and then cut into smaller pieces.



- ▶ **Grate or thinly slice** cheeses.
- ▶ **Chop peanuts, nuts, and seeds finely** or grind before adding to prepared food.
- ▶ **Spread peanut butter, nut butter, or seed butter thinly** on crackers. Or, mix with applesauce and cinnamon and spread thinly on bread. Use only creamy, not chunky, peanut, nut, and seed butters.
- ▶ **Avoid serving foods** that are as wide around as a nickel.

How can I minimize choking risk and make sure children are eating safely?

- ▶ **Make sure children are seated upright when eating** and not distracted. Keep mealtimes calm by avoiding too much excitement or distractions. Eating should take place in a quiet area away from noise and distractions, such as TV, loud music, and activities.
- ▶ **Sit with children and always actively supervise them while they are eating.** Monitor the size of food served and that children are eating properly (for example, not stuffing their mouths full). A choking child might not make any noise, so adults must keep their eyes on children who are eating.
- ▶ **Encourage children to eat slowly** and to chew completely before swallowing. Teach children to eat one bite at a time, and chew and swallow food before talking or laughing.
- ▶ **Make sure child care menu items reflect the developmental abilities** of the ages of children served. For example, for **children under 4 years of age**, serve shredded carrots and chopped tomatoes instead of baby carrots and cherry tomatoes. Also, serve mashed sweet potatoes instead of chunks of sweet potatoes.
- ▶ **Avoid eating “on the run”** in the car or moving vehicle. The driver cannot help a choking child and may be the only adult in the vehicle.
- ▶ **Make sure that children do not eat during times of high activity.** Eating while walking, running, or other active playing may increase a child’s risk of choking.
- ▶ **Monitor activities and games.** Avoid children’s games that involve catching a food item in the mouth or stuffing large amounts of food into the mouth.





My Notes: