

HEALTHY BEGINNINGS

CHOKING PREVENTION TIPS

Choking is when something becomes stuck in a person's airway, making them unable to breathe. If the airway is partly blocked, the body tries to clear the airway by coughing. If the airway is completely blocked, the stuck item must be removed or the child will not be able to breathe and could die.

The most common items that cause injury or death in children are food, coins, toys and latex balloons.

WHY DO CHILDREN CHOKE MORE EASILY?

Babies and young children under four years of age are at high risk of choking because:

- They explore the world by putting small objects into their mouths.
- They have small airways.
- Their cough is not as strong as an adult's to clear a partially blocked airway.
- Mucus and saliva around a swallowed object can form a seal in the airway, making it even more difficult to dislodge.

NON-FOOD CHOKING HAZARDS

Latex balloons are the leading cause of choking deaths resulting from non-food objects. Uninflated or pieces of broken latex balloons are dangerous because they are a smooth material and can conform to the child's throat, blocking the airway and making it impossible to breathe.

The shape, size and texture of objects can increase the risk of choking. Objects that can fit into a cardboard toilet paper roll (less than 3.17 cm or

1.25 inches in diameter), similar to a child's airway, are considered unsafe.

Any object that is round, ball-shaped or cylindrical can completely block a child's airway. This includes disk batteries, buttons, bottle tops/caps, coins and marbles.

Plastic corners snipped from milk bags or freezies can also be choking hazards.

Young children do not understand or recognize the dangers of choking. Here are some tips for lowering the risk of choking during playtime:

- Watch your child closely and check that the environment is safe.
- Keep small objects away from young children. Check for broken or loose pieces from toys or games around the space where your child is playing.
- Follow age recommendations on toy packages.
- Teach older children why toys with small parts are unsafe for babies and younger children. Show them how to keep these toys safely out of reach.
- Discourage unsafe fantasy play (e.g. using a rope around the neck like a leash).
- Do not use latex balloons. Choose mylar or foil balloons instead.

Children who are using pacifiers are at greater risk of choking if the pacifier becomes damaged. Check pacifiers every day and throw them away if they show signs of breakdown, or have been used for two months or more.

PUBLIC HEALTH

1-877-464-9675
TTY 1-866-512-6228
york.ca/feedingkids

FOOD CHOKING HAZARDS

Children under four years of age may lack the skill to prevent or stop choking as they are still developing the ability to chew and swallow food. There may be a higher risk of choking on food when they:

- Bite off a piece of food with their front teeth but may not have molars needed to grind and chew foods down to a small size.
- Are distracted while eating.
- Eat while walking/running, talking or laughing.
- Play games like throwing food in the air and trying to catch it with their mouth or trying to stuff their mouth with food.

Although any food can cause choking, some foods are more unsafe than others. If your child is under four years of age, avoid foods that are:

- Hard (e.g. peanuts/nuts and seeds, chunks of meat or cheese, hard candies, chunks of hard vegetables like raw carrots, apples).
- Small and round (e.g. popcorn, gumballs, pieces of dog food, grapes, hot dogs).
- Smooth and sticky (e.g. peanut butter spread thick or on a spoon, sticky candy).

This includes cough drops, chewing gum, chewable vitamins, gummy candies, marshmallows, fish with bones, sausages and snacks using toothpicks or skewers.

Also avoid flavoured gel candies (often called mini jelly cups, mini fruit gels or fruit poppers) since they are a choking risk because of the size and ingredient called Konjac.

How to lower the risk of choking on food

When preparing food, offer soft foods cut into half to one centimetre pieces. This way, it's big enough for little hands to grab but not big enough to be a choking hazard.



½ cm or ¼ inch



1 cm or ½ inch

Here are some more tips to lower the risk of choking:

- Watch your child when they eat.
- Seat your child in a highchair or booster seat; not walking, running, lying down or in a car.
- Keep mealtime calm and relaxed.
- Discourage food games (e.g. throwing food in the air and catching it in the mouth).
- Encourage your child to chew their food well.
- Give your child enough time to eat.

How to make unsafe foods safer

You can make unsafe foods safer by cutting or preparing them in a safe way. Here are some ideas:

- Chop or cut up fruit and vegetables, with skin such as grapes or cherry tomatoes.
- Grate or cut hard fruit and vegetables such as raw carrots or apples into thin strips and/or cook to soften.
- Remove pits from fruit with pits such as cherries and plums and cut into small pieces.
- Finely chop fibrous or stringy foods like celery and pineapple.
- Slice hot dogs, wieners and sausages lengthwise and cut into pieces.
- Crush peanuts, nuts and seeds.
- Spread peanut/nut butters thinly.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Consider learning infant/child cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). For more information contact York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653.

For information and resources on other nutrition and injury prevention topics, visit york.ca/feedingkids or york.ca/injuryprevention

To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.

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