



Safe Food for Babies and Children: Choking Dangers

Every child is at risk of choking. Older infants and children less than 5 years old easily can choke on food, toys and household objects. A single choking incident may result in death, permanent brain damage due to lack of oxygen and other complications associated with airway blockage.

According to 2001 data from the Centers for Disease Control, more than 17,000 children 14 years old or younger were treated in U.S. emergency departments for choking incidents. Sixty percent of these nonfatal choking episodes were associated with food items.

Children and infants do not grind or chew their food well and may attempt to swallow food whole. Large pieces of food easily can lodge in the throat and result in choking. Children are likely to choke on small, round, pliable objects that conform to the shape of the throat. The following foods and household items can be choking hazards:

Common Choking Hazards

Foods

Hot dogs and sausages
Chunks of meat or cheese
Whole grapes
Hard, gooey or sticky candy
Popcorn
Peanuts and nuts
Raw carrots
Fruit seeds
Apple chunks
Chewing gum

Household Items

Coins
Toys with small parts
Small balls and marbles
Balloons
Arts and crafts material
Ballpoint pen caps
Watch batteries
Jewelry



Julie Garden-Robinson, Ph.D., L.R.D.
Food and Nutrition Specialist

Tami Totland, L.R.D.
Food Safety Program Coordinator

NDSU
Extension Service

North Dakota State University
Fargo, North Dakota 58105

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Choking Prevention Tips

- For infants to age 1, cut up foods into small pieces no larger than ¼-inch. Toddlers generally can eat foods cut in ½-inch pieces or slightly larger.
- Watch infants and young children when they are eating. Eating while walking, running or laughing may lead to a choking incident.
- Parental supervision during mealtime is essential. Remind children to chew food thoroughly, take small bites and eat slowly. Siblings should not be put in charge of feedings.
- Keep dangerous toys, foods and household items out of children's reach.
- Learn how to provide emergency first aid for choking infants and children. The American Heart Association and American Red Cross provide courses on basic life support and CPR.

For more information on choking, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics Web site at: www.aap.org. For more information on nutrition and food safety, visit the NDSU Extension Service Web site: www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/food.htm

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