

Choking Prevention and First Aid for Infants and Children



When children begin crawling, or eating table foods, parents must be aware of the dangers and risks of choking. Older infants and children less than 5 years of age can easily choke on food and small objects.

Choking occurs when food or small objects get caught in the throat and block the airway. This prevents oxygen from getting to the lungs and the brain. When the brain goes without oxygen for more than 4 minutes, brain damage or even death may occur. Many children die from choking each year. Most children who choke to death are younger than 5 years of age. Two thirds of choking victims are infants younger than 1 year of age.

Balloons, balls, marbles, pieces of toys, and foods cause the most choking deaths.

The American Academy of Pediatrics believes that parents and other caregivers can prevent choking. The Academy offers the following choking prevention and first aid information for parents and caregivers of infants and children.

Dangerous foods

Do not feed children younger than 4 years of age any round, firm food unless it is chopped completely. Round, firm foods are common choking dangers. When infants and young children do not grind or chew their food well, they may attempt to swallow it whole. The following foods can be choking hazards:

- Hot dogs
- Nuts and seeds
- Chunks of meat or cheese
- Whole grapes
- Hard, gooey, or sticky candy
- Popcorn
- Chunks of peanut butter
- Raw vegetables
- Raisins
- Chewing gum

Dangerous household items

Keep the following household items away from infants and children:

- Latex balloons
- Coins
- Marbles
- Toys with small parts
- Toys that can be compressed to fit entirely into a child's mouth
- Small balls
- Pen or marker caps
- Small button-type batteries
- Medicine syringes

What you can do to prevent choking

- *Learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)* (basic life support).
- *Be aware that balloons pose a choking risk* to children of any age.
- *Keep the above foods from children* until 4 years of age.
- *Insist that children eat at the table*, or at least while sitting down. They should never run, walk, play, or lie down with food in their mouths.
- *Cut food for infants and young children* into pieces no larger than one-half inch and teach them to chew their food well.
- *Supervise mealtime* for infants and young children.
- *Be aware of older children's actions.* Many choking incidents occur when older brothers or sisters give dangerous foods, toys, or small objects to a younger child.
- *Avoid toys with small parts* and keep other small household items out of reach of infants and young children.
- *Follow the age recommendations on toy packages.* Age guidelines reflect the safety of a toy based on any possible choking hazard as well as the child's physical and mental abilities at various ages.
- *Check under furniture and between cushions* for small items that children could find and put in their mouths.
- *Do not let infants and young children play with coins.*

First aid for the child who is choking

Make a point to learn the instructions on the reverse side of this brochure. Post the chart in your home. However, these instructions should *not* take the place of an approved class in basic first aid, CPR, or emergency prevention. Contact your local American Red Cross office or the American Heart Association to find out about classes offered in your area. Most of the classes teach basic first aid, CPR, and emergency prevention along with what to do for a choking infant or child. Your pediatrician also can help you understand these steps and talk to you about the importance of supervising mealtime and identifying dangerous foods and objects.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

American Academy
of Pediatrics



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The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 57,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

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