

Safe Feeding Practices to Prevent Choking

Institute of Child Nutrition



Choking while eating can happen quickly and be very scary. Children 0-4years old are at the greatest risk of choking because they may not chew food properly. Want to make eating safer for young children in your care? Our partners at the Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) have some great resources on how to decrease choking risks.

Three Key Methods to Prevent Choking

1. Know which foods are the most common causes of choking.
2. Select and modify foods to the appropriate size, shape, and texture.
3. Supervise children during mealtime.

Foods That May Cause Choking and How to Modify Them

Food Item	Avoid	How to Modify
Cheese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round pieces, chunks, or blocks • String cheese cut into round pieces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut into thin slices or short strips • Shred or grate
Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole or raw fruit (grapes, cherries, mango, melon balls) • Fruit with pits or seeds • Large pieces of fruit with skin • Whole pieces of canned fruit • Raisins and other dried fruit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove tough skins or peels • Cut into small, thin strips or slices • Remove large seeds and pits • Choose ripe berries, which are softer and can flatten with a fork • Remove membrane from oranges or cut up canned mandarin oranges • Cut grapes or cherries lengthwise, then into smaller pieces no larger than ½ inch.
Grains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breads, cereals, or crackers with seeds, nuts, or whole grain kernels • Popcorn • Potato and corn chips • Pretzels and pretzel chips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut bread, pita bread, or tortillas into thin strips • Offer lightly toasted bread to decrease the “stickiness” • Choose items without seeds, nuts, or whole grain kernels
Legumes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raw beans or peas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cook well and smash with a fork
Meat, Poultry, Fish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry, tough, stringy, or large chunks of meat, poultry, or fish • Fish, meat, and poultry with bones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve ground meat, poultry, or fish in pieces of no more than ½ inch • Remove Bones from poultry, meat, and fish • Shred tough or dry meat
Nuts and Seeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peanuts, nuts, seeds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finely grind peanuts, nuts and seeds
Nut Butters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large amounts of creamy nut butters • Chunky nut butters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread a thin layer of creamy nut butters on toast or crackers
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole, raw, round, or hard pieces (cherry or grape tomatoes, carrot rounds, baby carrots, green peas, string beans, celery, corn, whole beans) • Large pieces of vegetables with skin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove tough skins or peels • Cook or steam hard vegetables until soft, then slice lengthwise • Cut raw vegetables like cucumbers into small, thin strips or slices • Cut cherry and grape tomatoes into lengthwise quarters or halves
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marshmallows, hard candy, gummy fruit snacks, ice cubes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not serve

Mealtime Behaviors to Encourage

Children and adults should be attentive and focused during mealtimes to lower the risk of choking. Talk with children about proper mealtime behaviors before they sit down for a meal. Some tips include:

- Only provide food at a table or high chair.
- Allow plenty of time for meals and snacks.
- Encourage children to chew foods slowly and thoroughly before swallowing
- Teach children not to talk or laugh while chewing.
- Have children sit upright at the table while eating.
- Do not allow children to walk or run while eating.
- Always stay in the room with the children.
- Keep mealtimes calm and quiet.
- Reduce distractions.
- Model safe eating behaviors like eating small portions and taking only one bite at a time.
- While serving infants, do not prop the bottle for the baby to feed themselves.