

PREVENTION IS THE BEST SOLUTION

- **Supervise eating.**

Sit down with children when they are eating and keep your eyes on them as they eat. Monitor the size of food served and ensure that children are eating properly (not stuffing their mouths). A choking child may not make any noise.

- **Make sure children are sitting upright when eating.**

Ensure that children do not eat when standing, walking, playing or lying down. Children should eat and drink only in the designated eating area.

- **Eliminate distractions during mealtimes.**

Children should be able to focus on chewing and swallowing. Teach children to eat one bite at a time and chew and swallow before talking or laughing. Loud and distracting activities should be discouraged.

- **Children should be removed from table or high chair if they begin to fall asleep during meal time.**



Staff trained in CPR and First Aid must be present and should sit with children when they are eating.

Public Health-Seattle & King County's Child Care Health Program is committed to supporting safe and healthy child care to children in Seattle and King County. Child care health consultants offer nursing, mental health and nutrition consultative services and trainings to early learning and school age care providers.

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PREVENTING CHOKING

Safe Practice Guidelines for
Early Learning & Preschool
Programs

Guidelines for Children Under Four Years of Age



CHILD CARE HEALTH PROGRAM

Public Health 
Seattle & King County

Young children are at risk for choking on foods. Although children can choke on any food, foods that are **hard or tough to chew, slippery, small, round, or sticky** present an increased risk.

Older babies (6 - 12 months) vary greatly in their developmental ability to swallow foods. It is important to proceed with caution when introducing foods for the first time. Babies should easily accept foods without gagging and grasp finger foods themselves. Watch carefully.

- **Cut food into ¼ inch pieces or smaller for 6-12 month olds.**

Toddlers (children learning to walk, typically 1 to 2 years old) have limited control of their mouth muscles and lack back teeth to grind up hard food. Food more easily slides back into the throat before it is completely chewed.

- **Cut food into ½ inch pieces or smaller for toddlers.**

Children 3 to 4 years old may have back molars but are still learning to chew and can be easily distracted while eating.

Children choke either because a large object closes off the throat or because smaller objects block the airway into the lung.



Avoid Choking Hazards

Reduce the risks of choking by changing the shape, size, or texture and serve in small, manageable bites.

- **Cut food into bite-size pieces or thin slices** (cheese, fruit, and meat).
- **Grind, chop or mash** foods.
- **Cook food until soft, especially beans, meat, pasta and rice.** Foods should be soft enough to mash between thumb and forefinger and to chew easily.
- **Steam vegetables until soft.**
- **Cut into thin slices or strips not rounds**, i.e. carrots, broccoli, zucchini.
- **Serve small amounts of food at a time.** Keep portion sizes small. With babies be sure the mouth is clear before giving the child another spoonful of food.

SIZE, SHAPE and TEXTURE are important things to consider when serving foods.

Both small and large pieces of food may cause choking. Small, hard pieces of food may get caught in the airway, if they are swallowed before being chewed well.

Larger pieces, more difficult to chew, are more likely to completely block the throat.

Foods which are firm, smooth, or slick may slide down the throat into the airway.

Dry, hard food may be hard to chew yet easy to swallow whole.

Sticky foods can stick to the back of the mouth or roof of the mouth and block the throat.

Note: To date, raisins appear to be safe to eat for young children. (American Academy of Pediatrics)

The following foods should not be served to children under four years of age because of risk of choking.

- Raw vegetables such as celery, carrots, broccoli, green peas, zucchini (OK if steamed and chopped or mashed)
- Hard fruit especially with peels such as crisp apples (OK if fruit is sliced into thin pieces.)
- Whole grapes (OK if cut into quarters)
- Whole berries (OK if mashed or cut up)
- Frozen banana pieces
- Whole nuts and seeds
- Chunks of nut butter (OK if spread thinly on crackers, toast, apple slices)
- Cheese chunks (thinly sliced cheese and deli meats are OK)
- Tube-shaped noodles (OK if cut up)
- Whole bagels, toddler biter biscuits
- Cooked beans (OK if mashed and moist)
- Hot dogs and link sausage
- Meat jerky
- Steak, roast, other fibrous meats (OK if chopped or ground with moisture added.)
- Hard pretzels
- Tortilla chips
- Popcorn
- Hard candy
- Fruit roll-ups
- Gummy bears, marshmallows

Reminder: No honey for babies under one due to risk of botulism.

