

Choking Hazards (Appendix A 5101:2-12-21)

Approximately 66 to 77 children younger than 10 years of age die from choking on food each year in the United States. 10,000 Emergency department visits annually can be attributed to choking on food among children of ages 14 years and younger. 19% were caused by candy or gum.

Children of all ages can easily choke, especially those younger than age 5 because they have fewer and smaller teeth, weaker chewing ability and narrower airways than older children and adults. Most dangerous of all, they often put things in their mouths, unlike older children.

Before young children have molars - teeth that grind food - they are able to bite off a piece of food with their incisors – teeth in the front of the mouth - but cannot grind it enough to swallow it safely. Children 3 to 4 years old have molars but are still learning to chew effectively. Children at this age also may be easily distracted when they are eating.

Foods such as round candy, grapes, marshmallows and meat sticks/sausages have a round, high-risk shape that can cause a plug in the throat. Peanut butter can also stick in the airway and form a tight seal that is difficult to dislodge.

- Choking is the fourth leading cause of accidental death in children under the age of 5.
- Children under age 5 are at greatest risk for choking injury and death.
- Toys, household items and foods can all be a choking hazards.
- The most common cause of nonfatal choking in young children is food.
- At least one child dies from choking on food every five days in the U.S. and more than 10,000 children are taken to hospital emergency rooms each year for food-choking injuries.
- Hot dogs account for 17% of food-related choking deaths among children younger than 10 years of age.

Food Preparation Requirements

Older Infants and Toddlers

Foods for older infants and young toddlers up to 24 months should be cut into one-quarter inch (¼") cubes or the about the size of a pea. Foods for toddlers over 24 months should be cut into cubes no larger than one-half inch (½").

Examples of foods that need this preparation are:

Hot Dogs/Sausage	Strawberries
Apples/Pears	Grapes
Celery	Meat/Chicken
Beans	Cherries
Melons	Cheese
Cherry/grape tomatoes	Carrots – cook until softened, then cut

Peanut butter - spread peanut butter thinly on toast or crackers. Do not serve in large globs.

Small, sticky or hard foods should not be served. Examples are:

Hard Candy-including: Skittles, M&Ms	Dried Fruits
Nuts	Gum or Gum Drops
Popcorn	Gummy Candies
Seeds	Chips

Marshmallows and pieces of crusty bread or bagels become gummy in the mouth and get stuck in the throat. These should not be not be given to babies or toddlers.

Preschoolers (Ages 3 - 5)

Prevent choking by shredding or cutting meat into small pieces, no larger than one-half inch (½") cubes.

Cut cheese into thin slices or small one-half inch (½") pieces.

Round foods like hot dogs and grapes should be cut in half lengthwise so the shape is no longer round.

Cut cherry tomatoes, grapes and strawberries in half.

Peanut butter - spread peanut butter thinly on toast, crackers, fruit or vegetables. Do not serve in large globs.

Hard candy over ½" in diameter and gum should not be provided to preschoolers in child care.