



Babies are at risk of choking on food due to their poor chewing and swallowing abilities. It is therefore very important to be careful about how a baby is fed. Serve foods that are the appropriate texture for a baby and avoid feeding certain foods that can cause choking. Following the general guidelines below will reduce the risk of choking in babies in your care.

Preventing Choking When Serving Foods

When serving food to babies, keep in mind the following:

- Keep mealtimes calm by avoiding too much excitement or disruption during eating. Feed the baby in a quiet area away from noise and distractions such as a TV set.
- Sit with the baby and supervise mealtimes and snacks. Do not leave babies alone when they are eating.
- Have babies sit in an upright position during meals and snacks.
- Make sure that biscuits, toast, and crackers are eaten only when the baby is in an upright position. A baby who eats these foods while lying down could choke on crumbs.
- Hold babies while giving them a bottle.
- Make sure the hole in the nipple of the baby's bottle is not too large (if the bottle is held upside down, the falling drops should follow each other closely and not make a stream).
- Serve foods that are the appropriate texture for the baby's development. Prepare food so that it is soft and doesn't require much chewing.
- Avoid using teething pain relief medicine before mealtime since it may interfere with chewing.
- Feed small portions.
- Encourage babies to eat slowly.

Feeding and Eating Behaviors to Avoid

Certain feeding and eating behaviors increase a baby's risk of choking on food and must be avoided. These include:

- Propping a bottle in the baby's mouth,
- Giving the baby a bottle with a nipple with too large a hole,
- Feeding solid foods to a baby before the baby is developmentally ready,

- 
- Feeding a baby solid foods in a bottle,
 - Feeding the baby too quickly,
 - Feeding while the baby is lying down, walking, talking, crying, laughing, running, riding in a vehicle, or playing,
 - Serving difficult-to-chew foods to babies with poor chewing and swallowing abilities,
 - Feeding a baby without close supervision,
 - Feeding foods that may cause choking (see list below).

Acceptable Finger Foods

Examples of finger foods that are safer and present a lower risk of choking include:

- Small pieces of ripe soft peeled banana, peach or pear,
- Small strips of toast or bread,
- Cooked macaroni,
- Thin slices of mild cheese,
- Soft cooked chopped vegetables such as string beans or potatoes,
- Teething biscuits, and
- Soft moist finely chopped meats.

Foods to Avoid That Can Cause Choking

Some foods are hard to control in the mouth, and they can slip into the airway before being chewed properly. Do not feed babies or young children foods or pieces of food that are the size or shape of a marble. Foods this size can be swallowed whole and could become lodged in a child's throat and cause choking. The following foods are **not** recommended for babies and young children because they can cause choking:

- tough meat or large chunks of meat,
- peanuts or other nuts and seeds (such as pumpkin or sunflower),
- peanut butter or other nut or seed butters,
- candy (e.g., hard candy, jelly beans, caramels, chewing gum),
- popcorn,
- hot dogs, sausages, or toddler hot dogs (even when cut into round slices),
- potato and corn chips and similar snack foods,
- pretzels,
- chunks of cheese,



- cooked or raw whole kernel corn,
- plain wheat germ,
- fish with bones,
- marshmallows,
- whole uncut grapes, berries, cherries, melon balls, or cherry or grape tomatoes,
- raisins and other dried fruit,
- whole beans,
- hard pieces of raw fruit,
- whole grain kernels,
- raw vegetable pieces (e.g., carrots, green peas, string beans, celery, etc.) or hard pieces of partially cooked vegetables,
- whole pieces of canned fruit (cut them up instead).

See above for a list of acceptable finger foods.

Food Preparation Techniques to Lower Choking Risk

You can lower a baby's risk of choking on food by taking the proper precautions. When preparing food for babies, make sure it is in a form that does not require much chewing. The following preventive preparation techniques are recommended:

- Cook foods until soft enough to easily pierce with a fork.
- Cut soft foods into small pieces (cubes of food no larger than 1/4 inch) or thin slices that can easily be chewed.
- Cut soft round foods, such as soft cooked carrots, into short strips rather than round pieces.
- Substitute foods that may cause choking with a safe substitute, such as thinly sliced meat or hamburger instead of hot dogs.
- Remove all bones from poultry and meat and especially from fish.

- 
- Cut grapes in quarters.
 - Remove pits and seeds from very ripe fruit and cut the fruit into small pieces.
 - Grind or mash and moisten food for young babies.
 - Cook and finely grind or mash whole grain kernels of wheat, barley, rice, etc. before feeding to a baby. Do not feed babies raw or cooked whole grain kernels in the whole form.

Remember, choking can occur anywhere and anytime there is food. Avoid those foods known to be a risk or modify them to make them safer. Closely supervise mealtimes and encourage babies to eat their meals sitting quietly. Meals can continue to be both a happy time and a safe time.

For more Information:

For more information, see Figure 9, “You Can Help Prevent Choking,” page 69.

Contact your local chapter of the American Red Cross (national web site: <http://www.redcross.org>), American Heart Association (national web site: <http://www.americanheart.org>), or American Lung Association (national web site: <http://www.lungusa.org>) for pamphlets, posters, and classes in emergency techniques for preventing choking, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and first aid. Also, a pamphlet on first aid, choking, and CPR can be ordered from the American Academy of Pediatrics (national web site: <http://www.aap.org>) or may be available from a pediatrician’s office.

Figure 9

You Can Help Prevent Choking

Babies and young children are at the highest risk of choking on food and remain at high risk until they can chew better. Choking kills

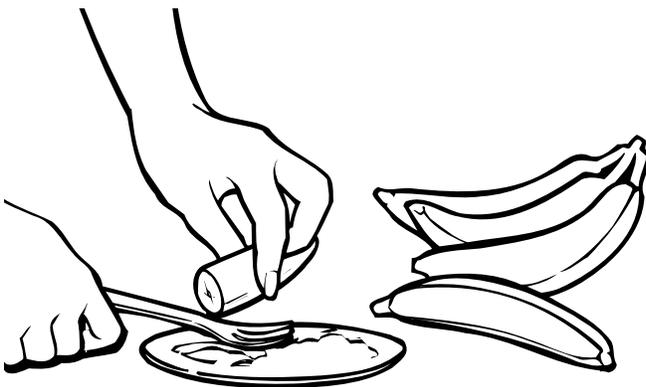
more young children than any other home accident. How can you make eating safer for young children?

Watch Babies and Children During Meals and Snacks to Make Sure They:

- Sit quietly for all feedings.
- Eat slowly.
- Chew food well before swallowing.
- Eat small portions and only one bite at a time.

Fix Table Foods So They Are Easy to Chew:

- Grind up tough foods.
- Cut soft food into small pieces or thin slices.
- Cut soft round foods, like cooked carrots, into short strips rather than round pieces.
- Remove all bones from fish, chicken, and meat before cooking.
- Cook food until it is soft.
- Remove seeds and pits from fruit.



Foods That Can Cause Choking and Should Not be Fed to Babies and Young Children:

Firm, smooth, or slippery foods that slide down the throat before chewing, such as:

- hot dogs, sausages, or toddler hot dogs (even when cut in round slices)
- peanuts and other nuts
- hard candy, jelly beans
- whole beans
- whole grapes, berries, cherries, melon balls, or cherry and grape tomatoes
- whole pieces of canned fruit

Small, dry, or hard foods that are difficult to chew and easy to swallow whole, such as:

- popcorn
- peanuts, nuts and seeds (like sunflower or pumpkin seeds)
- plain wheat germ
- whole grain kernels (like rice, wheat berries)
- small pieces of raw carrots or other raw or partially cooked hard vegetables or fruits
- pretzels
- cooked or raw whole kernel corn
- potato and corn chips

Sticky or tough foods that do not break apart easily and are hard to remove from the airway, such as:

- peanut butter or other nut or seed butters
- raisins and other dried fruit
- tough meat or large chunks of meat
- marshmallows
- chewing gum
- caramels or other chewy candy.