



Healthy Choices

Start Now



Choking Prevention Tips

Food choking hazards

Children under four years of age are at higher risk of choking on food because they:

- May not have back teeth (molars) needed to grind hard or chewy food down to a small size.
- Can be distracted and less focused while eating.
- Have small airways that make a blockage more likely.

Although any food can cause choking, some foods are more **unsafe** than others. If your **child is under four years of age, avoid offering foods that are:**

- Hard (such as raw carrots)
- Small and round (such as whole cherry tomatoes)
- Smooth and sticky (such as peanut/nut butter spread thickly or on a spoon)
- Hard to chew (such as dried fruit)

This also includes:

- hard cookies, chips
- popcorn
- raisins
- meat and fish with bones
- snacks using toothpicks or skewers
- chewing gum, hard candies, gummy or gel type candies and cough drops can also cause choking in young children.
- marshmallows
- whole grapes
- whole peanuts
- whole nuts
- whole seeds



How to lower the risk of choking on food

- When preparing food for young children, offer soft foods cut into half to one centimetre (cm) sized pieces.



- **Watch your child when they eat and drink.**
- Seat your child comfortably in a chair to eat and drink. Depending on their height, they may need to use a highchair or booster seat.
- Do **not** let your child eat while walking, running, lying down or while in a moving car.
- Keep mealtime calm and relaxed with no distractions.
- Encourage your child to chew their food well.
- Give your child enough time to eat.
- Discourage games such as throwing food in the air and catching it in their mouth.

See the next page for tips to make food safer for your child to eat.

Make unsafe food safer

You can make unsafe foods safer by cutting or preparing them in a safe way. Here are some ideas:

Foods that may cause your child to choke:	How to make food safer:
Vegetables and fruit	Remove skin, seeds and pits. Cut grapes, cherry tomatoes and cherries into quarters or small pieces. Grate hard fruit and vegetables such as raw carrots and apples or cook to soften and then cut into small pieces.
Round/cylinder shaped food such as wieners* (hot dogs) and sausages*	Slice lengthwise and then cut into small pieces.
Peanut/nut/soy butter and other sticky spreads	Spread thinly on toast or crackers; never serve on a spoon.
Peanuts, nuts and seeds	Crush or finely chop.
Meat and poultry	Serve tender, moist meat and poultry cut in small pieces. Remove all bones from meat and poultry before serving.
Fish	Remove bones from fish, or mash bones finely.

* Canada's food guide recommends limiting or avoiding highly processed foods.

Non-food choking hazards

- Babies and young children explore their world by putting things in their mouths.
- The shape, size and texture of objects can increase the risk of choking. Objects that can fit into a cardboard toilet paper roll (less than 1.25 inches or 3.2 cm in diameter, about the size of a child's airway), are considered unsafe.
- Any object that is round, ball-shaped or cylinder-shaped can completely block a child's airway. This includes disk batteries, buttons, bottle tops/caps, coins and marbles.
- Plastic corners snipped from milk bags or freezies can also be choking risks for children.

Did you know? Latex balloons can be a choking risk for young children. This usually happens when a child chews on a deflated balloon and then suddenly breathes in. A broken latex balloon has more risk because it can fill up a child's airway and form an airtight seal making rescue efforts very difficult.

Here are some tips for creating safer play:

- Watch your child closely and check that the environment is safe.
- Keep small objects away from young children.
- Check for broken or loose pieces from toys or games around the space where your child is playing.
- Follow age recommendations on toy packages.
- Teach older children why toys with small parts are unsafe for babies and younger children. Show them how to keep these toys safely out of reach.
- Discourage young children from putting small objects in their mouth during play.
- Do not use latex balloons. Choose mylar or foil balloons instead.

Consider learning infant/child cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Call 211 for local information.

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For nutrition information and to find out if your child (18 months to five years) is a healthy eater using Nutri-eSTEP, go to www.nutritionscreen.ca.

If you have questions about Nutri-eSTEP or about your child's eating, call Telehealth Ontario to talk to a Registered Dietitian at 1-866-797-0000 (TTY: 1-866-797-0007).