

Fact Sheet

How to prevent children from choking on food

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Why young children are at risk of choking on food

Young children do not have the back teeth needed to chew and grind lumps of food properly as these may not be fully developed until around four years of age. Before this age young children are still learning to eat solid food.

Food swallowed in large pieces is more likely to get stuck and block off the airways. If it *goes down the wrong way* this can cause young children to choke.

If young children run, play, laugh or cry while eating they are more likely to choke on their food.

Ways to make eating safer for young children

- Do not give foods that can break off into hard pieces.
- Avoid foods like raw carrot, celery sticks and apple pieces. Hard foods should be grated, cooked or mashed.
- Cut sausages, frankfurts, and other meats into small pieces. Tough skins on frankfurts and other sausages should be removed.
- Do not give popcorn, nuts, hard lollies, cornchips or other similar foods to young children.

At eating times

- Always stay with young children and watch them while they are eating.
- Make sure that young children sit quietly while eating.
- Never force young children to eat, as this may cause them to choke.

What to do if a young child chokes on food

Check first if the child is still able to breathe, cough or cry. If the child is breathing, coughing or crying, he or she may be able to dislodge the food by coughing.

Do not try to dislodge the food by hitting the child on the back because this may move the food into a more dangerous position and make the child stop breathing.

- Stay with the child and watch to see if their breathing improves.
- If the child is not breathing easily within a few minutes, phone 000 for an ambulance.

If the child is not breathing

- Try to dislodge the piece of food by placing the child face down over your lap so that their head is lower than their chest.
- Give the child four sharp blows on the back just between the shoulder blades. This should provide enough force to dislodge the food.
- Check again for signs of breathing.
- If the child is still not breathing, urgently call 000 and ask for an ambulance. The ambulance service operator will be able to tell you what to do next.

Kids Health at the Children's Hospital at Westmead and Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, gratefully acknowledges the Women's and Children's Hospital in Adelaide for permission to re-print the information contained in this fact sheet.

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First aid courses

It is very important to know what to do in an emergency. First aid can save lives and prevent serious injuries. For information about first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) courses in your local area contact:

- Australian Red Cross Society
Tel: (02) 9229 4100
- St John Ambulance
Tel: (02) 9212 1088.

Remember

- Do not give foods that break off into hard pieces.
- Make sure that young children sit quietly while eating.
- Do not give popcorn, nuts, hard lollies, corn chips or other similar foods to young children.
- Avoid foods like raw carrot, celery sticks and apple pieces. These foods should be grated, cooked or mashed.

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional
to make sure this information is right for your child.

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the
children's
hospital at Westmead

www.chw.edu.au

 **SYDNEY
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