

# Choking Hazards and Prevention



**Young children are at a high risk of choking while eating.** Children under the age of four have a small windpipe, increasing the likelihood for food to get stuck, and are still learning to chew properly.

To minimize the risk of a child choking, always supervise children during mealtime, ensure they remain seated and upright, and serve foods that are the appropriate shape, size, and texture. Encourage them to eat slowly, and to talk only when they are not chewing. Do not serve small (marble sized), sticky, or hard foods, as they are easy to swallow whole and difficult to chew.

## HOW TO MODIFY FOODS:

- Cut foods into pieces no larger than ½ inch
- Cut sphere shaped foods (such as grapes and cherry tomatoes) in half lengthwise then into smaller pieces
- Cook or steam hard foods like carrots until easily pierced with a fork
- Remove seeds, pits, and tough skin or peels from fruits and vegetables
- Grate, mash, or puree foods
- Remove bones from fish, chicken, and meat, finely chop, grate, ground, or thinly slice



## WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

### Signs of Choking Include:

- Quiet or silent, unable to talk or cry
- High pitch noises
- Gasping or wheezing
- Ineffective cough
- Bluish lips, nails, and skin
- Immediately use trained first aid and CPR skills

### Signs of Gagging Include:

- Loud coughing or sputtering
- Thrusting their tongue forward
- Watering eyes
- Reddened face
- Do not try to remove food with your fingers, this may cause it to get stuck
- Give the child time to work through it on their own



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
**COMMISSIONER SID MILLER**

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Food and Nutrition Division  
National School Lunch Program

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# Modifications to Make Foods Safer

The Following Foods Can Be A Choking Hazard For Children Under Four Years Of Age If Served Whole or in Chunks

CHOKING HAZARD	MODIFY TO MAKE IT SAFER BY...
Nuts and seeds	Chopping finely; serving chopped or ground in prepared foods
Hot dogs	Cutting in quarters lengthwise, then cut into smaller pieces
Fish, chicken, meat	Remove all bones before cooking; ground, finely chop, grate, or thinly slice
Whole grapes, cherries, melon balls, cherry/ grape tomatoes	Cutting in half lengthwise and again
Whole beans and peas	Cook well, then mash or puree
Fruits with pits/seeds	Remove seeds and pits, cut into smaller pieces
Raisins	Cooking in food
Chunks of meat	Chopping finely, grate, ground, thinly slice
Cheese	Chopping finely, grate, thinly slice
Hard fruit chunks (ex: apples, melon)	Chopping finely, cutting into thin strips, steaming, mashing, or pureeing
Raw vegetables	Chopping finely, cutting into thin strips, steaming, mashing, or pureeing
Carrots and celery	Steaming slightly then cut into sticks
Nut butters	Use creamy and not chunky spreads; spread thinly on crackers or bread or dilute by adding applesauce
Dried fruits or vegetables	Do not serve
Popcorn	Do not serve

For additional resources, visit the USDA and ICN websites:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/reducing-risk-choking-young-children-mealtimes>  
[https://theicn.org/wpfd\\_file/choking-prevention/](https://theicn.org/wpfd_file/choking-prevention/)



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