

Reduce the risk of choking

For children ages 1 to 5

Choking on food can happen at any age, but **young children are at higher risk** because their airways are small and can easily block. They are also still learning how to chew and swallow and can easily get distracted while eating.

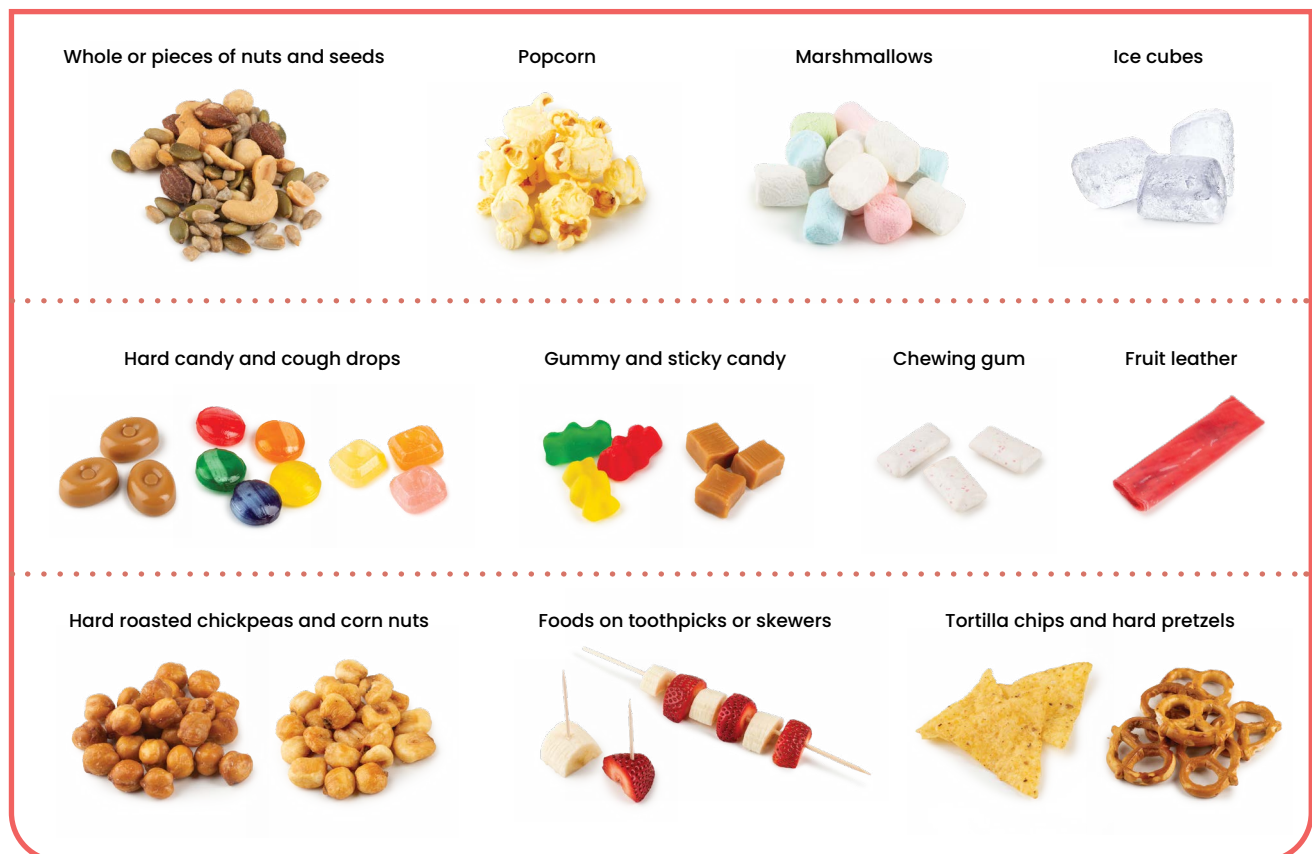
Choking can happen with any food, but some are considered high risk because of their shape, size and texture.

There are two categories of high-risk foods:

- Foods to avoid
- Foods to modify

Foods to avoid

These foods cannot be modified to make them safer and should not be served to children under age 5.



Foods to modify

This document provides recommendations on how to prepare these foods to lower the risk of choking. These recommendations are based on age.

However, all children are unique and develop at their own pace.

Their development level and ability also need to be considered.



Recommendations for most children ages 1 to 2 or for older children that may need extra precautions.

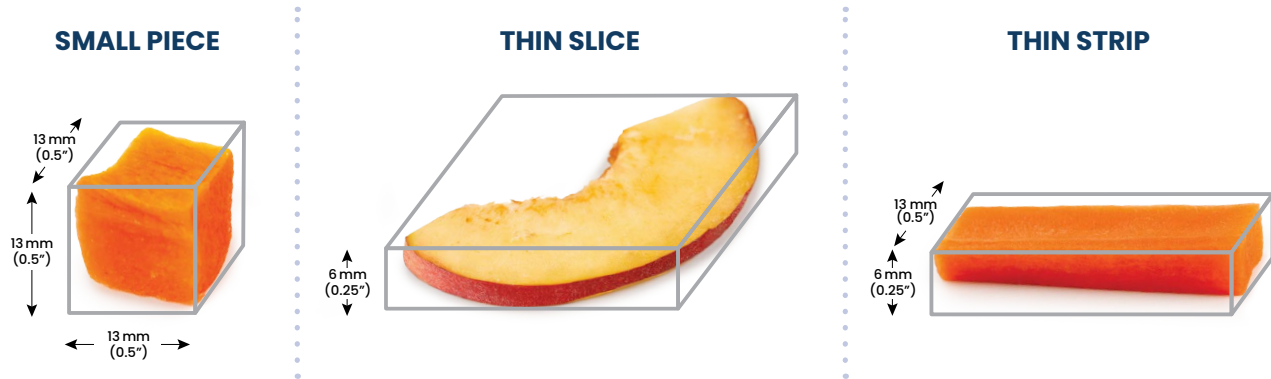


Recommendations for most children starting at age 2 and continuing until they turn 5.

Create a safer environment for meal and snack times:

- Supervise children while they eat.
- Make sure children are seated upright with their feet supported.
- Encourage children to take one bite at a time and to chew food well before swallowing.
- Avoid screens, toys and other distractions when eating.
- Avoid feeding kids in a moving vehicle, stroller or wagon.
- Be prepared to respond in the event of airway obstruction by taking first aid and CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) training courses.

Cutting sizes defined for the following pages



Be extra cautious about small round shapes

- **Small round foods** such as blueberries, peas, beans and raisins may pose a choking risk even if they are smaller than the size recommended above. It is recommended to cut, mash or flatten these foods to remove the round shape.
- **Small round slices from tube-shaped foods** like sausages, carrots and shrimp or **round halves** from grapes and cherry tomatoes may pose a choking risk. It is recommended to slice these foods lengthwise into strips as a first step of preparation to remove the round shape.

Choking hazard: **HARD FOODS**

Safer ways to serve **HARD VEGETABLES**

AGES
1-2

COOKED

Carrot and baby carrots



Broccoli floret and stem



Radish



Kohlrabi



Cut into thin strips and then into small pieces.
Cook until very soft so it can be mashed with fingers.

RAW

Raw hard vegetables are not recommended.

AGES
2-5

COOKED

Carrot and baby carrots



Broccoli floret and stem



Radish



Kohlrabi



Cut into thin strips.
Cook until tender so it can be easily pierced with a fork.

RAW

Carrot and baby carrots



Broccoli floret and stem



Radish



Kohlrabi



Finely grate.

Safer ways to serve **HARD FRUIT**

AGES
1-2

Apple



Peel. Remove core and seeds.
Cut into thin strips or finely grate.

Pear



Peel. Remove core or pit, and seeds.
Cut into thin slices.

Peach



Melons



Remove seeds and rind.
Cut into thin strips.

AGES
2-5

Apple



Remove core and seeds.
Cut into thin slices.

Pear



Remove core or pit, and seeds.
Cut into thin slices.

Peach



Melons



Remove seeds and rind.
Cut into thin slices.

Choking hazard: **HARD FOODS**

Safer ways to serve **HARD CRUNCHY FOODS**

AGES
1-2

Crackers, potato chips and cookies



Serve easy-to-chew varieties that quickly get soft in the mouth. Break them into pieces. Serve with dip or soak in milk to soften.

Croutons

Croutons are not recommended.

Rice cakes



Break them into pieces. Serve with dip or a spread to soften. Avoid stale ones.

AGES
2-5

Crackers, potato chips and cookies



Serve easy-to-chew varieties that quickly get soft in the mouth.

Croutons



Break croutons into small pieces and serve with dressing to soften.

Rice cakes



Break them into pieces. Avoid stale ones.

Choking hazard: **TUBE-SHAPED FOODS**

Safer ways to serve **TUBE-SHAPED FOODS**

AGES
1-2

Cooked hot dog sausage



Cut lengthwise into four strips and then into small pieces.

String cheese



Pickles



Cooked sausage



Remove casing. Cut lengthwise into four strips and then into small pieces.

AGES
2-5

Cooked hot dog sausage



Cut lengthwise into four strips.

String cheese



Pickles



Cooked sausage



Remove casing. Cut lengthwise into four strips.



Foods with melted cheese like pizza, lasagna and grilled cheese pose a choking risk. Cut these foods into smaller pieces for added safety.

Choking hazard: **SMALL ROUND FOODS**

Safer ways to serve **SMALL ROUND FRUIT AND VEGETABLES**

AGES
1-2

Grape



Cherry



Olive



Remove seeds or pit.
Cut lengthwise into four pieces and then into small pieces.

Blueberry



Cut into four pieces
or flatten with a fork.

Cherry tomato



Cut lengthwise into
four pieces and then
into small pieces.

AGES
2-5

Grape



Cherry



Olive



Remove seeds or pit.
Cut lengthwise into four pieces.

Blueberry



Cut into four pieces
or flatten with a fork.

Cherry tomato



Cut lengthwise into
four pieces.

Safer ways to serve **SMALL ROUND PULSES AND LEGUMES**

AGES
1-2

Bean



Cook until soft or use canned varieties.
Mash with a fork.

Chickpea



Green pea



Edamame



Cook until soft.
Remove skin and split in half.
Mash with a fork.

AGES
2-5

Bean



Cook until soft or use canned varieties.
Lightly flatten with a fork.

Chickpea



Green pea



Edamame



Cook until soft.
Remove skin and split in half.
Cut each half into two.

Choking hazard: CHEWY FOODS AND BONES

Safer ways to serve MEAT, POULTRY AND SEAFOOD

AGES
1-2

Fish, poultry and meat



Lobster



Mussels



Shrimp



Baby scallops



Cook until tender.
Remove bones, skin, shells and membranes.
Chop finely and serve with sauce to moisten.

Cook until tender. Remove shells and membranes. Cut in half lengthwise and chop finely. Serve with sauce to moisten.

AGES
2-5

Fish, poultry and meat



Lobster



Mussels



Shrimp



Baby scallops



Cook until tender.
Remove bones, skin, shells and membranes.
Cut into small pieces.

Cook until tender. Remove shells and membranes. Cut in half lengthwise and then into small pieces.

Safer ways to serve DRIED FRUIT

AGES
1-2

IN A RECIPE

Raisins

Dates

Prunes

Apricots



Remove pit and soak in hot water until soft.
Chop finely and add to a recipe.

BY ITSELF

Dried fruits served on their own are not recommended.

AGES
2-5

IN A RECIPE

Raisins

Dates

Prunes

Apricots



Remove pit and soak in hot water until soft.
Cut into small pieces and add to a recipe.

BY ITSELF

Raisins

Dates

Prunes

Apricots



Remove pit and soak in hot water until soft.
Cut into small pieces.

Choking hazard: STRINGY FOODS

Safer ways to serve STRINGY VEGETABLES AND FRUIT

AGES
1-2

COOKED

Celery



String beans



Asparagus



Rhubarb



Cut lengthwise and then into small pieces.
Cook until very soft so it can be mashed with fingers.

RAW

Raw stringy vegetables are not recommended.

Pineapple



Chop finely.

AGES
2-5

COOKED

Celery



String beans



Asparagus



Rhubarb



Cut lengthwise and then into small pieces.
Cook until tender so it can be easily pierced with a fork.

RAW

Raw stringy vegetables are not recommended.

Pineapple



Cut into small pieces.

Safer ways to serve LEAFY GREENS

AGES
1-2

COOKED

Spinach



Bok choy



Kale



Cut into small pieces and cook until soft.

RAW

Raw leafy greens are not recommended.

AGES
2-5

COOKED

Spinach



Bok choy



Kale



Cut into small pieces and cook until soft.

RAW

Lettuce



Spinach



Bok choy



Kale



Cut into small pieces and serve with sauce or dressing.



Choking hazard: STICKY FOODS

Safer ways to serve PEANUT BUTTER AND SIMILAR SPREADS

AGES
1-2

THIN LAYER

Peanut butter and similar spreads



Use creamy versions only. Spread a thin layer on warm toast and cut into strips.

IN OTHER FOODS

Peanut butter and similar spreads



Use creamy versions only. Add to smoothies, yogurt or oatmeal and mix well.

AGES
2-5

THIN LAYER

Peanut butter and similar spreads



Use creamy versions only. Spread a thin layer on warm toast and cut into strips, or spread a thin layer on an easy-to-chew cracker.

IN OTHER FOODS

Peanut butter and similar spreads



Use creamy versions only. Add to smoothies, yogurt or oatmeal and mix well.

* Peanut butter and similar spreads are not recommended when offered by the spoonful, served as a dip or spread on fruit and vegetables.

Choking hazard: DOUGHY FOODS

Safer ways to serve SOFT BAKED GOODS

AGES
1-2

Soft breads



Toast and cut into strips.

Option: The toasted strips can also be offered with a dip or spread to moisten them.

Tortilla

Naan



Cut or tear into pieces.

Muffin

Banana bread



Cut or tear into pieces.

AGES
2-5

Soft breads



Toast and cut into strips.

Tortilla

Naan



Cut or tear into pieces.

Muffin

Banana bread



Serve as is.
No need to modify.

* For sandwiches and wraps, prepare fillings and bread as recommended in this guide and add a fat spread (such as mayo or butter). Always cut them into small, manageable pieces for added safety.

The Registered Dietitians at Teach Nutrition would like to thank the following pediatric experts. Their contributions were valuable in reviewing the content of this resource.

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Veilleux, J., et al. (2024).

***Foreign body aspiration in children:
A review of prevention guidelines
by analyzing choking episodes in
Eastern Québec from 2006 to 2020.***

Canadian Journal of Respiratory,
Critical Care, and Sleep
Medicine;8(5):222-228.

This guide is intended as a starting point, and the food examples provided are not exhaustive. Some children may be ready for certain foods earlier than the suggested age or without extra preparation, while others may need more time. Every child develops at their own pace. If you're unsure about a food's safety, consult a healthcare professional.