

Choking Hazards

(last updated February 2021)



Provide a safe physical environment for babies and children while they are eating.

- Supervise babies and children when they are eating.
- Have an appropriate ratio of adults to children at mealtimes.
- Minimise distractions and encourage children to focus on eating.
- Ensure there is a designated time where children sit down to eat, rather than continuous grazing.
- Ask children not to talk with their mouths full.
- Have children sit up straight when they are eating. Sitting down and maintaining good posture are essential for safe eating and drinking. Do not allow walking, running or playing while children are eating.
- Place food directly in front of the child. This helps to prevent them twisting around to the left or right, which can cause them to lose control of the food in their mouth.
- Ensure there is an adequate parent / Session Facilitators with current first aid qualifications on all sessions.

Food that is served to children should be appropriate to a child's age and development.

High-risk food to exclude:

Exclude the following foods. They have the highest risk of choking on and are either not practical to alter, have no or minimal nutritional value, or both:

- whole or pieces of nuts
- large seeds, like pumpkin or sunflower seeds
- hard or chewy sweets or lollies
- crisps or chippies
- hard rice crackers
- dried fruit
- sausages, saveloys and cheerios
- popcorn
- marshmallows.

Altering high-risk food to lessen the choking risk.

Small hard foods

Hard foods can be challenging to swallow safely. For example...



Carrot



Apple

Grate, spiralise to create vegetable or fruit spirals, slice thinly using a mandolin, cook until soft and cut into strips (around 4-6 cm long) that can be picked up with one hand.

Small round or oval food

Foods like this can lodge in children's airways. For example...



Grapes



Cherry Tomatoes



Stone fruit/
large seeds/pips

Remove stones and large seeds or large pips. Quarter or finely chop grapes, berries and cherry tomatoes to an 8mm x 8mm size or smaller (about half the width of a standard dinner fork). Cook and squash with a fork.

Foods with skins or leaves

Food skins are difficult to chew and can completely seal children's airways. For example...



Stone fruit



Chicken

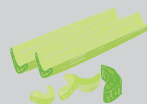


Salad leaves

Remove skin from chicken. Finely slice salad leaves. Remove stones. Cook until soft and cut into strips (around 4-6 cm long) that can be picked up with one hand.

Fibrous or stringy foods

The fibres in these foods can make it hard for children to break the food up into smaller pieces. For example...



Celery

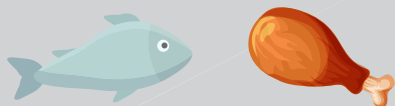


Raw pineapple

We recommend slicing these foods thinly across the grain of fibres. Peel the skin or strong fibres off where possible. Slice these foods thinly across the grain of fibres.

Food with bones

For example...



Fish

Chicken nibbles

Remove bones.

Compressible foods (meat)

These are foods that can squash into the shape of a child's throat and get stuck. For example...



Steak

Cook meat until very tender. Choose mince, shred or chop meat to 8mm x 8mm sized pieces.

Thick pastes

Foods like this can form to the shape of a child's airway and stick to its side. For example...



Peanut butter

Use smooth thick pastes sparingly, spreading thinly and evenly onto bread.

What can I do if a child is choking?

Call for help. There will be someone present with a First Aid Certificate. Ask for their assistance.

Playcentre Aotearoa supports the MOH & MOE guidelines.

Where food is provided by parents for their child at Playcentre:

- Playcentres will promote 'best practice' as outlined in the MoH guidance around altering high-risk food to lessen the choking risk.
- If a parent deems these foods appropriate for their child and includes them in their lunchboxes, the Playcentre will allow the children to eat these foods whilst employing their current practices of ensuring children are seated whilst eating, they are supervised by an adult whilst eating, and that there is adequate parent / Session Facilitators with current first aid qualifications on all sessions.

- The centre will provide the parents a copy of the new regulations and guidelines - the MoH's Reducing food-related choking for babies and young children at Early Learning Services (see link below) via email/print-out to all members, including new members and add to their Enrolment information packs/documents given to new members.

Where food is provided by the Playcentre:

- Food brought in by parents to be shared with other children should be deemed as food prepared by the service. If the food was not provided by the parent for their own child(ren), then the Playcentre will adhere to the MoH's Reducing food-related choking for babies and young children at Early Learning Services (see link below).

Reducing food-related choking for babies and young children at Early Learning Services

<https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/reducing-food-related-choking-babies-young-children-early-learning-services-dec20.pdf>

For more guidance visit the Ministry of Health at www.health.govt.nz