

# Choking Prevention and First Aid for Infants and Children



When children begin crawling, or eating table foods, parents must be aware of the dangers and risks of choking. Children younger than 5 years can easily choke on food and small objects.

Choking occurs when food or small objects get caught in the throat and block the airway. This can prevent oxygen from getting to the lungs and the brain. When the brain goes without oxygen for more than 4 minutes, brain damage or even death may occur. Many children die from choking each year. Most children who choke to death are younger than 5 years. Two-thirds of choking victims are infants younger than 1 year.

Balloons, balls, marbles, pieces of toys, and foods cause the most choking deaths.

Read more about choking prevention and first aid.

## Dangerous foods

Do not feed children younger than 4 years round, firm food unless it is chopped completely. Round, firm foods are common choking dangers. When infants and young children do not grind or chew their food well, they may try to swallow it whole. The following foods can be choking hazards:

- Hot dogs
- Nuts and seeds
- Chunks of meat or cheese
- Whole grapes
- Hard, gooey, or sticky candy
- Popcorn
- Chunks of peanut butter
- Raw vegetables
- Fruit chunks, such as apple chunks
- Chewing gum

## Dangerous household items

Keep the following household items away from infants and children:

- Balloons
- Coins
- Marbles
- Toys with small parts
- Toys that can be squeezed to fit entirely into a child's mouth
- Small balls
- Pen or marker caps
- Small button-type batteries
- Medicine syringes

## What you can do to prevent choking

- *Learn CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation)* (basic life support).
- *Be aware that balloons pose a choking risk* to children up to 8 years of age.
- *Keep dangerous foods from children* until 4 years of age.
- *Insist that children eat at the table*, or at least while sitting down. They should never run, walk, play, or lie down with food in their mouths.
- *Cut food for infants and young children* into pieces no larger than one-half inch, and teach them to chew their food well.
- *Supervise mealtime* for infants and young children.
- *Be aware of older children's actions*. Many choking incidents occur when older brothers or sisters give dangerous foods, toys, or small objects to a younger child.
- *Avoid toys with small parts*, and keep other small household items out of the reach of infants and young children.
- *Follow the age recommendations on toy packages*. Age guidelines reflect the safety of a toy based on any possible choking hazard as well as the child's physical and mental abilities at various ages.
- *Check under furniture and between cushions* for small items that children could find and put in their mouths.
- *Do not let infants and young children play with coins*.

## First aid for the child who is choking

Make a point to learn the instructions on the following pages of this publication. Post the chart in your home. However, these instructions should not take the place of an approved class in basic first aid, CPR, or emergency prevention. Contact your local American Red Cross office or the American Heart Association to find out about classes offered in your area. Most of the classes teach basic first aid, CPR, and emergency prevention along with what to do for a choking infant or child. Your pediatrician also can help you understand these steps and talk to you about the importance of supervising mealtime and identifying dangerous foods and objects.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

## From your doctor

American Academy  
of Pediatrics



The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

American Academy of Pediatrics  
Web site—[www.HealthyChildren.org](http://www.HealthyChildren.org)

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# CHOKING/CPR

**LEARN AND PRACTICE CPR (CARDIOPULMONARY RESUSCITATION).**

**IF ALONE WITH A CHILD WHO IS CHOKING...**

**1. SHOUT FOR HELP. 2. START RESCUE EFFORTS. 3. CALL 911 OR YOUR LOCAL EMERGENCY NUMBER.**

## START FIRST AID FOR CHOKING IF

## DO NOT START FIRST AID FOR CHOKING IF

- The child cannot breathe at all (the chest is not moving up and down).
- The child cannot cough or talk, or looks blue.
- The child is found unconscious/unresponsive. (Go to CPR.)

- The child can breathe, cry, or talk.
- The child can cough, sputter, or move air at all. The child's normal reflexes are working to clear the airway.

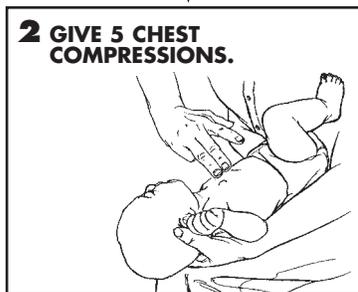
## FOR INFANTS YOUNGER THAN 1 YEAR

### INFANT CHOKING

If the infant is choking and is unable to breathe, cough, cry, or speak, follow these steps. Have someone call 911.



ALTERNATING WITH



**Alternate back blows (slaps) and chest compressions until the object is dislodged or the infant becomes unconscious/unresponsive. If the infant becomes unconscious/unresponsive, begin CPR.**

### INFANT CPR

To be used when the infant is **UNCONSCIOUS/UNRESPONSIVE** or when breathing stops. Place infant on flat, hard surface.

#### 1 START CHEST COMPRESSIONS.

- Place 2 fingers of 1 hand on the breastbone just below the nipple line.
- Compress chest at least 1/3 the depth of the chest, or about 4 cm (1.5 inches).
- After each compression, allow chest to return to normal position. Compress chest at rate of at least 100 times per minute.
- Do 30 compressions.



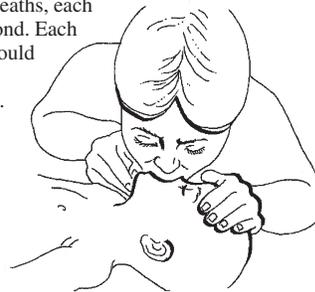
#### 2 OPEN AIRWAY.

- Open airway (head tilt–chin lift).
- If you see a foreign body, sweep it out with your finger. Do NOT do blind finger sweeps.



#### 3 START RESCUE BREATHING.

- Take a normal breath.
- Cover infant's mouth and nose with your mouth.
- Give 2 breaths, each for 1 second. Each breath should make the chest rise.



#### 4 RESUME CHEST COMPRESSIONS.

- Continue with cycles of 30 compressions to 2 breaths.
- After 5 cycles of compressions and breaths (about 2 minutes), if no one has called 911 or your local emergency number, call it yourself.



**If at any time an object is coughed up or the infant/child starts to breathe, stop rescue breaths and call 911 or your local emergency number.**

**Ask your pediatrician for information on choking/CPR instructions for children older than 8 years and for information on an approved first aid or CPR course in your community.**

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## DO NOT START FIRST AID FOR CHOKING IF

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- The child cannot cough or talk, or looks blue.
- The child is found unconscious/unresponsive. (Go to CPR.)

- The child can breathe, cry, or talk.
- The child can cough, sputter, or move air at all. The child's normal reflexes are working to clear the airway.

## FOR CHILDREN 1 TO 8 YEARS OF AGE

### CHILD CHOKING (HEIMLICH MANEUVER)

Have someone call 911. If the child is choking and is unable to breathe, cough, cry, or speak, follow these steps.

1. Perform Heimlich maneuver.
  - Place hand, made into a fist, and cover with other hand just above the navel. Place well below the bottom tip of the breastbone and rib cage.
  - Give each thrust with enough force to produce an artificial cough designed to relieve airway obstruction.
  - Perform Heimlich maneuver until the object is expelled or the child becomes unconscious/unresponsive.
2. If the child becomes **UNCONSCIOUS/UNRESPONSIVE**, begin CPR. →



### CHILD CPR

To be used when the child is **UNCONSCIOUS/UNRESPONSIVE** or when breathing stops.

Place child on flat, hard surface.

#### 1 START CHEST COMPRESSIONS.

- Place the heel of 1 or 2 hands over the lower half of the sternum.
- Compress chest at least  $\frac{1}{3}$  the depth of the chest, or about 5 cm (2 inches).
- After each compression, allow chest to return to normal position. Compress chest at rate of at least 100 times per minute.
- Do 30 compressions.



1-hand technique



2-hand technique

#### 2 OPEN AIRWAY.

- Open airway (head tilt–chin lift).
- If you see a foreign body, sweep it out with your finger. Do NOT do blind finger sweeps.



#### 3 START RESCUE BREATHING.

- Take a normal breath.
- Pinch the child's nose closed, and cover child's mouth with your mouth.
- Give 2 breaths, each for 1 second. Each breath should make the chest rise.



#### 4 RESUME CHEST COMPRESSIONS.

- Continue with cycles of 30 compressions to 2 breaths until the object is expelled.
- After 5 cycles of compressions and breaths (about 2 minutes), if no one has called 911 or your local emergency number, call it yourself.

**If at any time an object is coughed up or the infant/child starts to breathe, stop rescue breaths and call 911 or your local emergency number.**

**Ask your pediatrician for information on choking/CPR instructions for children older than 8 years and for information on an approved first aid or CPR course in your community.**