

Choking Prevention for Preschoolers

Choking is a risk for preschoolers. Even though toys with small parts carry a warning that they are "not for children under 3," the average age of children who die from choking incidents is 4.6 years.

Researchers at the Children's National Medical Center and the George Washington University School of Medicine in Washington reviewed information from a national database of children's hospitalizations in 2003. The study, published in 2010, reviewed data from 2003 pediatric patients who were admitted for choking to over 3,000 hospitals in 36 states. That year, 2.7 million children were treated for choking and nearly 2,000 died. The average age of the affected children was 3.5 years. The death rate shows that choking is absolutely not a benign health issue, but an extremely serious one. Lost lives are not the only cost associated with choking. On average, children who were admitted to the hospital spent 6.4 days there and underwent two procedures to remove the object at an average cost of \$34,652.

In the study, forty-two percent (42%) of the choking culprits were food items, with the rest classified as "inorganic" products, mostly toys.

Tips for Preventing Choking

KidSource and SafeKids offer these tips to reduce the chances of choking.

At Mealtime

- ▶ Insist that your child eat at the table, or at least sit down. Never leave a child unattended when



eating. Encourage your child to eat slowly and chew food well. Make eating calm and unhurried. Watch for "chipmunking"--when a child fills his cheeks with food and doesn't swallow it. Avoid feeding your child while walking, playing, or riding in the car.

- ▶ Cut up foods that are firm and round and can get stuck in your child's airway, such as:
 - Hotdogs: Always cut hotdogs length-wise and then into small pieces. (Hot dogs are to blame for around 17 percent of food-related asphyxiations among children.)
 - Grapes: Cut them into quarters.
 - Raw vegetables: Cut them into small strips or pieces that are not round.
- ▶ Other foods that can pose a choking hazard include:
 - hard or sticky candy, such as whole peppermints or caramels
 - nuts and seeds (Don't give peanuts to children under age 7.)
 - popcorn
 - spoonfuls of peanut butter
 - ice cubes and cheese cubes
 - dried fruits, including raisins

During Playtime

- ▶ Consider purchasing a small parts tester to determine whether toys and objects in your home may present a hazard to young children. If you do not have a small parts tester, you can use an empty toilet paper roll, which is slightly larger in diameter than a small parts tester. Do not let young children play with anything that can fit into these cylinders.
- ▶ Don't allow young children to play with toys designed for older children. Teach older children to put their toys away as soon as they finish playing so young siblings can't get them.
- ▶ Check under furniture and between cushions for dangerous items young children could find. Get on the floor on your hands and knees so you are at your child's eye level. Look for small items including:
 - coins
 - marbles
 - watch batteries (the ones that look like buttons)
 - pen or marker caps
 - cars with small rubber wheels that come off
 - small balls or foam balls that can be compressed to a size small enough to fit in a child's mouth
- ▶ Never let your child play with or chew on uninflated or broken latex balloons. Many young children have died from swallowing or inhaling them.
- ▶ Regularly check toys for damage that may have created loose small parts. Damaged or dangerous toys should be repaired or thrown away immediately.



- ▶ Don't let your small child play on bean bag chairs made with small foam pellets. If the bag opens or rips, the child could inhale these tiny pieces.

Children of all ages are susceptible to choking, but kids younger than five are especially vulnerable because they have fewer (and smaller) molars, weaker chewing ability, and narrower airways than older children and adults. Most dangerous of all, they're prone to putting things in their mouths--unlike older children. In addition to the tips for safety, become familiar with life-saving techniques such as child cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), abdominal thrusts (Heimlich Maneuver), Automated External Defibrillators (AED) or calling 911. Sign up to receive product recalls with the Consumer Product Safety Commission at www.cpsc.gov.

References:

- ConsumerReports.org. (2007). *Food choking hazards and children: What parents need to know*. Retrieved from http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/babies-kids/child-safety/food/choking/food-choking-hazards-and-children-1-07/overview/0701_choking-hazards.htm
- Drummond, K. (2010, April 23). Kid chokings still 'extremely serious' problem. AOL, Inc. Retrieved from <http://www.aolnews.com/health/article/kid-chokings-still-extremely-serious-problem/19443266>
- Ferenczi, D. (2010, April 23). Choking deaths are alarmingly high. *Consumer Reports*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.consumerreports.org/safety/2010/04/childhood-choking-fatalities-and-hospitalizations.html>
- KidsSource.com. (2001). *Preventing choking among infants and young children*. Retrieved from <http://www.kidsource.com/safety/prevent.choke.html>
- New York State Department of Health. (2009). *Choking prevention for children*. Retrieved from http://www.health.state.ny.us/prevention/injury_prevention/choking_prevention_for_children.htm
- SafeKidsUSA. (2009). *Choking prevention tips*. Retrieved from <http://www.safekids.org/safety-basics/safety-resources-by-risk-area/choking-suffocation-and-strangulation/choking-prevention-safety.html>
- Shah, R., Patel, A., Lander, L., & Sukgi, S. (2010). Management of foreign bodies obstructing the airway in children. *Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Injury*, 136(4). Retrieved from <http://archotol.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/136/4/373>

This document can be made available in alternative formats, such as large print, Braille, or audio tape, by contacting your county Extension office. (TTY 1-800-947-3529)

Prepared by: Joan E. LeFebvre, Professor, Department of Family Development, University of Wisconsin-Extension
Reviewer: Dave Riley, Extension Specialist, Child Development and Early Education, UW-Madison
Layout: Penny Otte, Office Operations Associate, Family Living Area Office, Vilas County

For more information on Parenting and Child Development, contact: Joan E. LeFebvre, Area Family Living Agent, University of Wisconsin, Extension, 330 Court Street, Courthouse, Eagle River WI 54521-8362, 715-479-3653, FAX 715-479-3605, E-Mail joan.lefebvre@ces.uwex.edu
October 2010