

# Prevent Choking & Suffocation

Choking and suffocation can occur at any age, but is more common in babies and toddlers. Choking is the 4<sup>th</sup> leading cause of unintentional death in children under the age of 5. At least 1 child dies from choking on food every 5 days in the U.S. Common foods and other items children choke on include:

- Bubble gum and other types of gum
- Peanuts, other nuts, and popcorn
- Peanut butter (especially from a spoon or with soft white bread)
- Whole grapes and foods with pits, such as cherries
- Hot dogs (whole or cut into round pieces)
- Hard candy and cough drops
- Balloons, button-type batteries, small toy parts, marbles, coins, and safety pins.

In adults, choking usually occurs when food is not chewed properly. The risk increases with talking or laughing while eating, drinking alcohol, taking drugs, or having a condition that impairs chewing or swallowing. In young adults, choking can result from playing the “choking game.” With this, the person uses a rope or belt to cut off blood and oxygen to the brain for a brief “high.”

Learn first aid for choking for babies, children, and adults from your local Red Cross. Find a class in your area at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or call 800.733.2767 (800.RED.CROSS).



## ADULTS

### Do This



Let your doctor know if you have problems swallowing pills or vitamins. Ask if they come in liquid forms or if you can crush pills and mix them with juice or food, such as applesauce.

### Not That



Do not split or crush pills if the label says not to unless okayed by your doctor or pharmacist. Do not omit a medicine because you have a hard time swallowing it.

### Do This

If you or a loved one has a medical problem that impairs swallowing, choose liquids and foods with textures that are easier to eat. Discuss, with your doctor, medicines and procedures that aid in swallowing. If you wear dentures, make sure they fit well. Laugh and talk between swallows. Limit alcohol before meals and while you are eating.



### Not That



Don't eat too fast. Don't have foods that you choke on easily or that need a lot of chewing. Examples are tough meats, nuts, raw crunchy vegetables, caramels, peanut butter, and dry crumbly food, such as crackers. DO NOT swallow a teaspoon of cinnamon.

# CHILDREN

## Do This



Make sure baby cribs and cots are safe for your child. Find out about crib recalls, crib safety, and the newest safety standards for cribs from the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) at [www.cpsc.gov/cribs](http://www.cpsc.gov/cribs).

## Do This



Lay babies (up to 12 months old) on their backs to sleep in their bassinettes or cribs.

## Not That



Never put a child in a crib with bars that are more than 2 inches apart. Do not use cribs with broken, loose, or missing parts. A child can get caught between the crib and its loosened side. Cribs made after June 2011 cannot have traditional drop sides.

## Not That



Do not lay babies to sleep on their stomachs. Do not have pillows, blankets, quilts, bumper guards, stuffed toys, or other soft products in the crib, bassinet, or play yard. Instead of a blanket, use a sleep sack or warm sleeper to keep your baby warm.

## Do This



Make sure that gaps between the sides of the crib and mattress are not larger than two fingers so a baby cannot get stuck in spaces between the mattress and the crib. Make sure a baby's face is not covered during sleep.

## Not That



Do not fall asleep on a bed with your baby or toddler. You could roll over and crush your child. Or, blankets or pillows could cover his or her nose and mouth.

## Do This



Teach children to chew foods well before swallowing. Supervise children when they eat.

## Not That



Don't let children eat too fast or put too much food in their mouths at one time. Do not give large pieces of food to young children.

## Do This



Keep plastic bags away from children. Children can easily cover their nose and mouth with trash, garbage, dry-cleaning and other plastic bags.

## Not That



Do not leave plastic shopping bags within the reach of children.

## CHILDREN

### Do This



Cut and tie off window blind cords and keep them out of children's reach. Or, use blinds with safety cords or window treatments that have no cords or ties.

### Not That



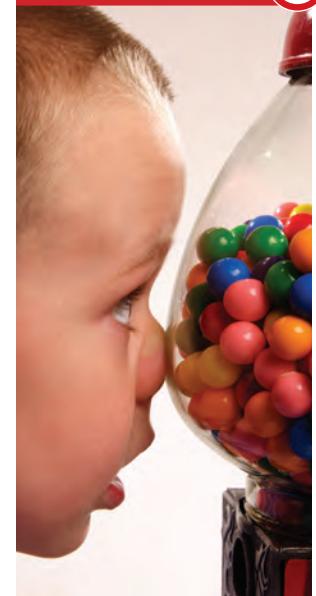
Do not have blinds with looped cords or other window treatments with ties on windows in the house, especially ones near cribs or in a child's bedroom.

### Do This



Cut food into small bites. For children under age 4, cut foods into pieces that are a half-inch or less. Cut grapes and hot dogs in halves or quarters. Give small amounts of food at a time.

### Not That



Do not give foods that are easy to choke on to children under age 5. Keep all choking hazards out of young children's reach.

### Do This



Have your child sit while eating. Teach your child to chew foods well before swallowing.

### Not That



Do not allow your child to eat while playing, running, or moving around.

## Do This



Follow warnings to keep small toys and items with small parts away from young children. This includes:

- Button batteries
- Coins
- Dice, game pieces, and marbles
- Small cars
- Stuffed animals with plastic eyes

## Not That



Do not give anything to children under age 3 that is small enough to fit through a cylinder that is 2 1/4 inches long by 1 1/4 inches wide – about the size of a 3-year-old's throat. This is slightly wider than a coin sorter for quarters or about the width of 2 fingers. It is a little smaller than the center of a toilet paper roll at 1 1/2 inches in diameter.

## Do This



Remove and throw away plastic film covers that come on CDs, toys, and appliances.

## Not That



NEVER give latex balloons to children under age 5.

## Do This



Keep cords on baby monitors, lamps, and night lights at least three feet away from the crib. Or use ones that operate without cords.

## Not That



Do not put canopy curtains or wall decorations with streamers or ribbons near the crib.