

Ask an Expert – Three Tips to Prevent Choking Hazards in Young Children

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Introducing solid foods to infants is a welcome milestone for parents, but it also involves knowing how to prevent choking, a leading cause of injury among young children. By understanding common hazards and practicing safe feeding techniques, parents can create a safer environment for their children.

To help parents and caregivers, Utah State University Extension experts have released guidelines to reduce choking risks during meals and snacks.

Key strategies to prevent choking include:

1. Preparing food safely.
Hard, sticky, or round foods pose significant choking hazards for children under four. Experts recommend:
 - Cutting grapes, cherries, and similar foods into small pieces.
 - Cooking or steaming hard vegetables and slicing them into thin strips.
 - Avoiding marshmallows, hard candies, and popcorn for children under four.
2. Creating a safe eating environment.
Active adult supervision is vital. Children should always sit upright at a table or highchair during meals and avoid eating while lying down, playing, or moving. To help them focus on eating, distractions such as television and phones should be eliminated.

3. Teaching safe eating behaviors.
Parents can model and teach good eating habits, such as taking small bites, chewing thoroughly, and avoiding talking or laughing with food in the mouth.

Choking can escalate quickly, but with preparation and knowledge, parents can react effectively and even prevent these incidents.

Know the signs of choking and how to respond. Symptoms include weak coughing, inability to cry or make noise and skin turning pale or blue. For infants, the recommended response is back blows and chest compressions, while abdominal thrusts are suitable for older children. The American Red Cross offers first aid training to help caregivers build confidence in emergencies.

To see the full report, including how to respond to choking, visit the Extension publication: [Keeping Kids Safe at Meals: Preventing and Responding to Choking](#).

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