

# Food-related choking in young children

Children can choke on food at any age but the risk is higher in children under 5 years. Refer to the Ministry of Health Guidelines to find out more. Search 'food and choking' at [health.govt.nz](http://health.govt.nz).

## Reduce the risk of food-related choking in babies and young children

Young children can choke on food quite easily. This is because they have small air and food passages, are still learning to move food around in their mouths and their biting, chewing and food-grinding skills are still developing.

### Watch the YouTube clip: 'Tips to prevent choking'

To minimise their risk of food-related choking:

- Always make sure young children **sit down** while they eat, and that **an adult is with them** while they are eating or drinking.
- Offer **food that matches their chewing and grinding** abilities.

## Be aware of foods which are likely to cause choking:

**Small hard foods** that are difficult for children to bite or chew such as:



nuts and seeds



raw carrot



celery



sliced raw apple



rice crackers

**Small round foods** that can get stuck in children's throats



raisins



lollies



whole grapes



berries



seeds



raw peas



cherry tomatoes

**Foods with skins or leaves** that are difficult to chew



sausage skins



chicken skin



lettuce leaves



fruit skins

**Compressible food** which can squash into the shape of a child's throat and get stuck there



sausages



frankfurters



sliced meat



popcorn\*

\*popcorn is not recommended for children under 3 years

**Thick pastes** that can get stuck in children's throats



nut spreads



peanut butter

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**Fibrous or stringy foods** that are difficult for children to chew



celery



cooked rhubarb



pineapple

**To reduce the risk of choking on these foods, you can:**

**Alter the food texture:** grate, cook, finely chop or mash the food:



grated carrot



cooked apple



grated cheese



mashed potato

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**Remove the high-risk parts of the food** - peel off the skin or remove the strong fibres



celery strings



grape skins



fruit skins



apple skins

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**Avoid giving small hard foods** such as whole nuts and large seeds, until children are at least five years old



nuts



seeds



sunflower seeds

**Parents and caregivers need to learn choking first aid and CPR**

For information on choking first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), see your **Well Child Tamariki Ora Health Book** or visit the **HealthEd website** ([www.healthed.govt.nz](http://www.healthed.govt.nz))