



Small Kids, Small Foods

Nothing quite pleases a toddler like being able to eat grown-up food. And parents take equal delight in their child's accomplishment. Conquering solid edibles, however, takes practice. Until they have all their teeth and are able to chew their food well, children are inclined to swallow certain foods whole. That can cause choking, which is especially dangerous because of a child's narrow airway and underdeveloped ability to cough up obstructing foods. If you are caring for a child under five, the following steps may prevent choking:

- Avoid giving young children hot dogs, hard candies, grapes, and nuts. A study at Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health blamed these four foods for more than 40% of all childhood food-choking deaths. Encourage vigorous chewing - probably the best way is to demonstrate it from time to time.
- Monitor all eating sessions.
- For kids under three, cut up solid foods in small pieces and serve them in small quantities. Don't allow kids to eat while talking, running or jumping. And no one - at any age - should eat or drink while lying down.
- Don't let kids toss foods into their mouths or pour small candies from the package into their upturned mouths.

In 1983, the American Association of Pediatrics recommended that warning labels (indicating appropriate age groups) be affixed to risky foods. For instance, after prompting by the USDA, Gerber changed the label on its meat sticks, warning that they are intended only for toddlers who have teeth and who have learned to chew solid foods properly. While parental caution and patience will always be the best safeguards, such warning labels can go a long way in preventing choking incidents.