

Fact Sheet



Division of Developmental Disabilities Health Care Services

Prevent Choking Hot Topics Health Information Fact Sheet #12

Choking is when someone cannot breathe because food, a toy/object, or other material is stuck inside their throat. This blocks the airway and stops the person from getting air into their lungs.

Fact Sheet guidelines have been provided as general information, not as a substitution for medical treatment from a physician.

Prevent Choking:

- Encourage quiet, seated mealtimes
- Discourage eating while walking, running, playing, lying down or standing
- Assign a specific staff person or caregiver to monitor each meal or snack
- Provide plenty of space around members who grab food or objects from others
- Choose holiday decorations carefully: avoid tinsel, small ornaments, and items that look like candy
- Monitor members with swallowing problems and/or who eat non-food items
- Watch for “pocketing” of food (when a person keeps adding food to their mouth without swallowing)
- Do not allow members who are at risk for choking or have swallowing issues to eat alone
- Discourage eating and drinking while in a moving vehicle
- Monitor members known to swallow non-food items (batteries, bolts, plastics, etc.)
 - Keep the member’s preferred non-food items stored out of sight and out of reach
- The following are foods that are known to cause choking and should be avoided or served with care
 - Hard Candy
 - Hot Dogs/Sausages
 - Popcorn
 - Nuts & Seeds
 - Chunks of Peanut Butter
 - Chewing Gum
 - Sticky Foods (marshmallows, fruit roll-ups, gel candy, etc.)

Signs And Symptoms Of Choking:

- Universal sign for choking is one or both hands at the neck area and unable to talk or cough
- Inability to talk or breathe
- Forceful coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing
- Lack of alertness or unconsciousness
Call 9-1-1 immediately!
- Pale or bluish color to lips and/or nails
Call 9-1-1 immediately!

Call or have someone call 9-1-1 immediately before any other call/action when choking is suspected.

Vendor Action Items:

- Ensure all staff and caregivers call 9-1-1 FIRST when choking is suspected
- Confirm all staff is current on CPR and First Aid Training and Certification (maintain files)
- Do not schedule other activities during mealtimes; a chaotic mealtime is a safety hazard
- Have a PLAN for:
 - Monitoring each and every meal and/or snack (assign specific staff)
 - Establishing calm “seated” mealtimes (post mealtime rules)
 - Supervision of members at risk for choking or who have swallowing issues
 - Supervision of members who eat or swallow non-food items and objects
- Schedule a choking prevention presentation

The Prevent Choking Hot Topics Fact Sheet is in a series of Health Information Fact Sheets compiled by DDD Health Care Services. Issued November 2014; Reviewed/ Revised April 2025.

Equal Opportunity Employer / Program • Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities • To request this document in alternative format or for further information about this policy, contact the Division of Developmental Disabilities Customer Service Center at 1-844-770-9500; TTY/TDD Services: 7-1-1