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

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 individuals who are at risk for choking or have swallowing issues to eat alone
- Discourage eating and drinking while in a moving vehicle
- Monitor individuals 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: one or both hands at the neck area; 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 mealttime rules)
  - Supervision of individuals at risk for choking or who have swallowing issues
  - Supervision of individuals who eat or swallow non-food items and objects

- Schedule a choking prevention presentation

The Division of Developmental Disabilities has declared November Choking Prevention Awareness Month. A presentation providing general information to prevent and address choking events is available. Call (602-771-8129) or email (dtasev@azdes.gov) to schedule your on-site presentation today! The content of this presentation is not intended as a substitute for CPR/First Aid Training and/or medical care.