Children of any age can choke on food, but children under 4 years are most at risk because they:
> do not have back teeth to chew and grind food
> are still learning to eat, chew, and swallow.

Gagging is different to choking. Gagging is a normal part of learning to eat chewable foods. It is a normal response and children recover quickly. Children should gag less as their chewing skills develop.

How to make eating safer
> Do not give food or drink to children when they are running, playing, laughing or crying.
> Always sit children down to eat.
> Stay close and watch children while they eat.
> Never force children to eat.
> Encourage children to eat slowly and chew well.
> Encourage children to feed themselves.

How to make food safer to eat for children under 4 years of age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of food</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>How to modify to make food safer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foods with skins</td>
<td>Sausages, hotdogs, frankfurts.</td>
<td>Remove skins, cut lengthwise, and then into small pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round foods</td>
<td>Grapes and cherry tomatoes.</td>
<td>Cut in half.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foods with seeds, pips and stones</td>
<td>Cherries, stone fruit, olives.</td>
<td>Remove seeds, pips and stones and cut into small pieces.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foods that are hard, crunchy or</td>
<td>Hard fruit and vegetables such</td>
<td>Grate, very finely slice, cook or mash.</td>
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<tr>
<td>stringy</td>
<td>as raw apple, carrot and celery.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corn chips, popcorn, nuts, and</td>
<td>Don’t serve these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hard or sticky lollies.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very hard crackers that don’t</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dissolve or break up easily.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foods that are tough and chewy</td>
<td>Meat with gristle and bone.</td>
<td>Remove fat, gristle and bone. Cut into small pieces.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tough meat.</td>
<td>Mince, shred or slow cook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foods containing small bones</td>
<td>Fish, chicken.</td>
<td>Remove bones and cut into small pieces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preventing choking on food

What to do if a child chokes on food

How serious is the situation?

Difficulty breathing (can’t cough)
DIAL 000 FOR AN AMBULANCE
Follow the operator’s instructions

Breathing (can cough)

If child is unconscious
(eg. appears as if they are asleep)
Start CPR

Place child over your lap so that their head is lower than their chest
Give up to 5 sharp blows between the shoulder blades with the heel of your hand.
Check mouth after each back blow and remove any food

Is the food dislodged?

Yes
Stay with the child to make sure they are breathing normally

No
Continue alternating 5 back blows with 5 chest thrusts* until medical aid arrives

Is the food dislodged?

Yes

No

If child gets worse
DIAL 000 FOR AN AMBULANCE
Follow the operator’s instructions

If child is conscious
(eg. awake and alert)
Ask child to cough. Remove any food that comes out.

Reassure child

Stay with the child to make sure they are breathing normally

If back blows don’t work, give up to 5 chest thrusts *

Is the food dislodged?

Yes

No

Continue alternating 5 back blows with 5 chest thrusts* until medical aid arrives

*For chest thrusts find the same compression point as you would for CPR.

Chest thrusts are similar to chest compressions but sharper, and given at a slower pace, whilst the patient is sitting or standing. Infants (< 1 year) should be placed on a firm surface on their back with their head low.

Useful contacts

> St John Ambulance (SA) – Ph. 1300 360 455, www.stjohnsa.com.au
> Australian Red Cross (SA) – Ph. 8100 4500, www.redcross.org.au/sa
> Kidsafe SA – Ph. 8161 6318, www.kidsafesa.com.au
> Parent Helpline – Ph. 1300 364 100, www.cyh.com and click on the link to Parenting and Child Health.

For more information

If a child has a chewing or swallowing problem then talk to a doctor or speech pathologist.

This resource was revised with input from Start Right-Eat Right, Kidsafe SA, SA Dental Service, and the Women’s and Children’s Health Network.