



## HEALTHY HABITS

### 7 tips on how to protect your child

For young children and babies, choking is one of the most common causes of accidental death. Our medical professionals have recently seen children choking at alarming rates. Foreign object aspiration is also a risk for older children, teenagers and even adults. In the last four months of 2002 at B.C.'s Children's Hospital, three teens needed to have sharp objects removed from their airways.

Our pediatric otolaryngologists, along with the Safe Start team, are developing the first comprehensive program to prevent foreign body aspiration and caustic ingestion through awareness, education, product development and safety legislation. Although the most important precautions are also the simplest, this knowledge is far from universal.

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# 1

### Crunchy Culprits

Crisp, crunchy foods can cause a coughing fit and end up lodged in the bronchi (breathing tubes for the lungs). Peanuts are the most common culprits but other common hazards include nuts, raw carrots, celery, popcorn, sunflower seeds, dried peas and beans.

Don't give hard, crunchy foods to children until they are at least three years old and can consistently chew and swallow crusty bread without coughing.



# 2

### Round and Rubbery

Foods like hot dogs and whole grapes are, surprisingly, the most deadly. They can get stuck between the vocal cords and completely



block breathing, unless dislodged by the Heimlich maneuver. Cut hot dogs and grapes lengthwise into small quarter sections until children are at least five years old and can chew and swallow steak without coughing.

# Choking hazards

by Dr. Jeffrey Ludemann

# 3

### The Usual Suspects



Most parents know the risks associated with difficult-to-swallow foods like hard candies. These foods should be avoided until children are at least five years old and can understand the danger. Fish bones and other small bones also present an obvious risk.

# 4

### Don't Talk with your Mouth Full!

When we teach our kids good table manners, we're actually establishing important safety habits.

Talking, laughing or running while eating are all dangerous behaviours that increase the risk of choking.

Teach your children to chew food thoroughly before swallowing. Kids should be sitting quietly at the table and be supervised during meals. Each new food texture should be introduced carefully in this setting.



# 5

### Foreign Objects



Teach young children not to put objects in their mouths and keep dangerous objects out of their reach. Coins are the most common offenders and end up lodged in the esophagus and can require surgery. Plastic toy parts, metal hardware, fishing tackle and blow darts can end up in the voice box, windpipe or bronchi. It's also important to teach older children and adults not to hold pins, needles, nails, screws or thumb-tacks between their lips.

# 6

### Caustic Products

Disc batteries and alkaline cleaning products can cause severe burns of the esophagus and life-long swallowing problems. Safety-proof your home by keeping disc batteries and cleaning products, including wash powders and liquids, out of the reach of children. Educate older children about the risks associated with these products.



# 7

### Early Treatment



If you suspect your child is choking or has swallowed a foreign object, go to the emergency room right away and tell them you think your child choked or swallowed something. If possible, bring a sample of the object or product. Do not perform a Heimlich maneuver unless your child is turning blue and is unable to speak or cough. It is important to get immediate medical attention if your child is choking on dried peas or beans, disc batteries or cleaning products.