



Health & Safety Alert #18-02-09

Choking

The major reason for medical emergencies is due to choking. The purpose of this Alert is to share information on foods commonly connected to choking incidents, action to be taken, common causes, and prevention.

It is suggested that individuals at risk for choking be assessed and a plan developed to mitigate the risk.

Foods commonly choked on:

- **Meat** was the leading cause of choking incidents and included:
Hamburgers, hotdogs, sandwiches, ham, steak and chicken
- **Pasta**
Pizza and other pasta
- **Vegetables**
Potatoes, particularly french fries
- **Fruit**
Apples, bananas, pineapple chunk, orange slices, and grapefruit sections
- **Additional Food**
Peanut butter sandwich, marshmallows

What to do if someone chokes:

- Follow your first aid training.
- If individual's airway is blocked, perform **the Heimlich maneuver**. This has been extremely successful in dislodging food in the airway. Persons interested in training should contact their local American Red Cross or local health care agencies. Remember that if back blows are trained and used, they are to be reported as MUIs
- Even if Heimlich Maneuver is successful, immediately notify health care professional. It is advisable to have the individual physically checked by a health care professional following use of this procedure.

If breathing problems continue, or Heimlich maneuver is unsuccessful, call emergency medical services/911. If the person has passed out, chest compression will continue to move oxygen through the system until the EMTs arrive.

Common causes of choking:

- Eating too fast.
- Inattention to eating, distraction by other persons or activities.
- Lack of appropriate supervision.
- Placing too much food in one's mouth.
- Poor oral motor skills.
- Incorrect diet texture. If food is to be cut be sure it is in the appropriate sized pieces.
- Diet is not communicated from setting to setting or to new staff working with the individual.
- Eating something with two or more diet textures, especially anything with a thin liquid and a solid component such as cereal and milk or eating a hot dog and drinking a soft drink at the same time.

Note: Pay particular attention to Individuals with Prader-Willi Syndrome.

What we know:

Choking can happen easily and quickly to anyone. Make meal/snack time as safe as possible by ensuring the applicable preventive measures are in place.

Preventive Measures

- Be diligent during meals; supervision of all individuals must be a high priority.
- Be especially watchful of those individuals with mealtime concerns.
- Be sure good assessments of eating skills have been done where appropriate.
- Always follow the correct diets and textures.
- Communicate promptly diet changes to all settings.
- Recognize foods that are common in choking incidents and pay close attention at meals when these are on the menu.
- Prepare diets properly based on the individual's plan.
- Educate caregivers on the importance of mealtime safety.
- It is an important time for managers, supervisors, volunteers, or family to be present and assist with the meal.
- Use adaptive equipment and aides as indicated.
- **Supervision/Support during mealtime is critical to a healthy/safe mealtime experience.**

Special Note: Choking episodes have occurred with individuals while in motor vehicles. It is very difficult to supervise and intervene in a vehicle should a choking episode occur. Eating in vehicles should be avoided particularly for individuals with known swallowing problems, the tendency to eat rapidly, or a history of choking.

For questions or comments regarding the above Alert, please contact the MUI/Registry Unit at (614) 995-3810.

REISSUED: February 2009