

CHOKING-IT HAPPENS MORE THAN YOU THINK!

Many of us have attended trainings on the Heimlich Maneuver and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), but most of us have never had to use these skills in a real-life situation. We hope we will never have to, yet we hope we will be able to control our fear, make sound split second decisions and take the appropriate action.

We do not expect students, guests or family members to choke, but it could happen. People can choke on hard candy, celery sticks, chicken bones, tooth picks, and cheese cubes, among others.

Carrot coins, popcorn and hot dogs are commonly known foods that can cause choking, but choking can happen with any food.

We need to assess choking risk before planning dinners, parties or events involving food and snacks. Event coordinators, educators, instructors, parents etc. must take measures to ensure that the risk is minimized for any type of choking incident.

Not all foods or snacks are appropriate for everyone. Always keep in mind food allergies and potential choking hazards when planning meals and snacks for you, your family and others.

Choking Symptoms

- Sudden inability to talk
- Coughing
- Gagging
- Hand signals and panic (sometimes pointing to the throat)
- Clutching the throat-The natural response to choking is to grab the throat with one or both hands. This is the universal choking sign and a way of telling people around you that you are choking.
- Wheezing
- Passing out



Consider these scenarios that have occurred:

- ◆ One person got food stuck in her throat and collapsed at dinner leaving her partially unconscious.
- ◆ A second person, was attending a gardening class and couldn't breathe which put her in distress after quickly swallowing a whole large chunk of fresh pineapple she barely chewed.
- ◆ A third person was dining with friends. He was talking while eating and unexpectedly got a large piece of steak lodged in his throat. Another friend at the table saw this person unable to talk and turning blue, then quickly jumped into action performing the Heimlich Maneuver. This successfully caused the chunk of steak to immediately dislodge, removing the choking hazard.

We never expect to face life and death situations when they happen. This could happen to anyone of us. We need to be ready. We need to be informed. What would you do in these situations? Would you be able to do the Heimlich Maneuver or perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation? Would you panic? Would you try to help the person? Would you remain calm? Would you call 911? Every situation is different.

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Tips and Considerations

- ◆ Chop and cut up foods well. (i.e. especially steak, hot dogs, fresh fruit, cheese chunks, poultry)
- ◆ Remember to chew food properly; don't rush when eating. Chew your food well before swallowing.
- ◆ Eat slowly.
- ◆ Don't talk, laugh and eat at the same time. You increase your risk of choking or a painful bite to the tongue
- ◆ Do not give whole nuts to very young children. They need to be able to chew well to handle eating whole nuts.
- ◆ Do not place frilly toothpicks in food; they may break off and become a hidden choking hazard.
- ◆ Sit up when eating. Do not eat when lying down. Do not eat when running or walking
- ◆ Be alert to special considerations for people with chewing and swallowing disorders; follow medical advice.

Confusion and fear can take over in an emergency.

We need to gain confidence in our emergency skills, especially if never having had to use them before.

Every minute counts when a person chokes, so you must react confidently and have a plan in place to handle this type of emergency.

Choking can be prevented.

Take a few minutes to think about your own readiness and reaction if you are ever in this situation.

- 1. Plan to take a CPR class.*
- 2. Learn the Heimlich Maneuver.*
- 3. Don't be afraid to call 911.*
- 4. Refresh your skills on a regular basis.*
- 5. Be prepared in the event you find yourself in need of these lifesaving skills.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.eatright.org/health/wellness/preventing-illness/how-to-avoid-choking>

<http://www.heart.org/en/cpr>

<https://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/cpr>

USEFUL WEBSITES: **UF** | **IFAS Extension** UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Broward County

<http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/broward/family-and-consumer-sciences/>

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