



## Important information about choking:

### *If a choking episode occurs:*

- Call for help.
- Activate Emergency Medical Services (EMS).
- Render appropriate First Aid.
- Seek Medical Treatment.

Choking occurs when the airway in the throat becomes blocked. Choking can result from accidentally breathing in pieces of food or thin liquids while swallowing. If an individual has experienced a choking incident the team should consider having him/her assessed by a qualified speech pathologist (or other appropriate professional) for a formal evaluation to rule out or diagnose swallowing disorders.

Examples: chair side assessment, videofluoroscopy.

### *Choking can occur because of:*

- An object in an individual's airway. Some examples are: coins, pieces of plastic utensils, pen or marker caps and balloons.
- Medical issues that affect gagging, choking and swallowing reflexes. Some of these are: Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, Neurological impairments, Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disorder and the aging process.
- Eating food too fast and/or not chewing adequately.
- Eating while walking, talking, riding in a vehicle or moving around.
- Swallowing difficulties caused by side effects or long term use of some medications. Some examples are: sedatives, psychotropic medications and anticonvulsants.
- Eating after drinking too much alcohol or receiving sedation such as prior to a medical appointment.



***Choking can often be prevented by taking the following precautions:***

- As needed, individuals should be assessed by an appropriate professional to determine whether they need to have food or drink of a particular consistency, or adaptive equipment.
- If individuals need a special diet, caregivers should be instructed regarding choice of food, preparation of food, size of portions and the size of individual pieces of food. The following foods are especially difficult to swallow: meat, white bread and peanut butter. Examples of special diets are chopped, fine ground and pureed.
- If adaptive equipment or special dining techniques are required for an individual, caregivers need to be sure the equipment is used routinely and is in good repair.
- Information on special diets, adaptive equipment or special dining techniques must be included in each individual's program plans.
- Eating is always safest if an individual is fully upright (or elevated per physician's order). Eating while lying down is unsafe.
- Provide adequate supervision to individuals who need to be monitored or assisted while eating. Individuals may eat too quickly or eat foods that are not safe for them. Plans should be developed and consistently implemented to safeguard these individuals.
- Eating in moving vehicles should be avoided.
- Information about individual's dining needs should be shared with other providers or people who are responsible for the individual's well being while they are eating.

***Signs to watch for:***

- If a person is conscious and cannot cough, speak or breathe, assume that the airway is blocked.
- A person who is choking may clutch at his or her throat.

***Training:***

- Caregivers should be trained in each individual's needs/supervision/plans for eating.
- Caregivers should be trained in First Aid and CPR.
- Caregivers should be trained in information which helps to avoid choking.



**Statewide Committee on Incident Review (SCIR)**

NYS Office for People With Developmental Disabilities  
44 Holland Avenue  
Albany, NY 12229

[scir.opwdd@opwdd.ny.gov](mailto:scir.opwdd@opwdd.ny.gov)

OPWDD Information Line: 1-866-946-9733