

Subject: Choking Prevention**May 2012**

Choking occurs when a person's airway becomes blocked by food or other objects, or when liquid enters the airway during swallowing. It is very important that people remain aware of choking hazards, and know how to prevent choking, as well as how to respond in an emergency.

If a person is conscious and cannot cough, speak, or breathe—or if the individual is unconscious—assume the airway is blocked. Additional signs to watch for:

- A person who is choking may clutch or grab at his/her throat
- Skin, lips, and nails may turn red, then blue as oxygen levels drop

If a choking episode occurs, immediately seek to unblock the airway. Also:

- Activate Emergency Medical Services, render first aid, and perform the [Heimlich maneuver](#)
- Call for emergency medical assistance

Awareness is critical to choking prevention. Choking can occur because of:

- Objects such as coins, pens, marker caps, and balloons lodged in an airway
- Health issues that affect swallowing and gag reflexes (e.g., cerebral palsy and other neuromuscular disorders, neurological impairments, gastroesophageal reflux disease, and the aging process)
- Eating or drinking too fast, not chewing food thoroughly, or while talking and moving around
- Eating or drinking while under the effects of alcohol or sedating medication—certain medications such as anticonvulsants, psychotropic medications, and sedatives can cause swallowing difficulty

Individuals with developmental disabilities should be assessed by an appropriate professional to determine proper food and/or liquid consistencies. OPWDD's standardized food consistencies are as follows:

- Whole
- Cut to size – 1 inch piece, ½ inch piece, ¼ inch piece
- Ground: rice size and moistened
- Pureed: smooth and creamy, no lumps, and not runny
- Also, liquids can be thickened to the consistency of nectar, honey, or pudding

Caregivers should be trained in:

- Preparing food according to an individual's dining plan
- First aid, CPR, and choking prevention

Additional action steps include:

- Using adaptive equipment appropriately and maintaining in good repair
- Ensuring that individuals are seated upright while eating or drinking, and not eating or drinking while in a moving vehicle
- Providing appropriate supervision to all individuals while they are eating or drinking
- Remembering that certain foods such as meat (especially hot dogs), white bread, popcorn, grapes, and peanut butter are difficult to swallow and can increase the likelihood of a choking emergency

For additional information, please visit

www.opwdd.ny.gov/opwdd_careers_training/training_opportunities/choking_prevention_training_resources.