



# Health and Welfare Alert

## Preventing Choking You make the difference in choking prevention.

**Public Service Announcement:**  
**Preventing Choking**

with Jeff Davis,  
director, DODD



[Watch Director Davis's PSA](#)

### If Someone is Choking

- Follow First Aid training
- Call 911
- If someone else can call 911, perform abdominal thrusts, formerly known as the Heimlich maneuver
- For a person using a wheelchair or with a physical characteristic making it difficult to use the abdominal thrust
  - Move person to flat, hard surface
  - Initiate CPR chest compressions to help unblock airway
- If abdominal thrusts are successful, immediately notify a health care professional for a physical check-up

### Things to Remember

If the choking person can cough, let them do so. Stay with the person to encourage them to cough. If the object is visible in the mouth, attempt a finger sweep.

If an adult has a completely blocked airway, give up to 5 blows between the shoulder blades with the heel of your hand. If the blockage is not relieved, employ abdominal thrusts. Continue cycles of 5 back blows and 5 abdominal thrusts until the object is coughed up or the person starts to breathe or cough.

The American Red Cross includes back blows as an intervention, and the American Heart Association does not. Use intervention methods required by your training.

**Resource:**  
**Choking Prevention,**  
**Module 2 of DODD Health  
and Welfare Series**

### Special considerations for people with IDD

- Problems with swallowing (dysphagia) and aspiration are common issues for people with developmental disabilities.
- Swallowing risks are highest for people with Cerebral Palsy (which can affect the muscles involved in swallowing, as well as the muscles in the arms, legs, and neck).

### Common causes and contributing factors in choking-related incidents

- Eating too fast
- Person served wrong diet texture
- Supports per the person's plan were not provided
- Not using adaptive equipment
- Food stealing

## Know the Signs of Choking

- Face turning red
- Lips turning blue
- Food spilling out of mouth
- Inability to talk or make much sound
- Wide-eyes, panicked look on face
- Person may quickly leave area, indicating they are experiencing a swallowing issue
- Unconsciousness or appearing asleep

## Commonly choked on foods:

- Peanut Butter
- Hot dogs
- Bread products
- Fruit
- Nuts
- Raw vegetables
- Foods consisting of two different textures such as pancakes and syrup

Choking Related Incidents 2014-YTD 2020							
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	YTD 2020
# of Choking Medical Emergencies	389	347	422	381	381	425	312
Successful Life-Saving Intervention Provided	375	339	406	364	357	418	294
# of Choking Deaths	18	8	16	17	21	7	18

## Examples:

- Staff prepared a grilled cheese sandwich for a person by cutting into ½ pieces. Per the diet, the pieces should have been ¼ inches due to the person's known history of swallowing difficulty. The person was to eat slowly and drink between bites. They refused and choked. Staff performed choking interventions, and the person was taken to the hospital. The person died 2 weeks later.
- Young child was at a pool party with family and choked on a hot dog. He could not be saved and passed away.
- Person who was on pureed diet grabbed a peer's dinner of chicken and rice, which was prepared at a different consistency. Staff and EMS performed lifesaving measures, but ultimately the person died.

## Role of the Team in Choking Prevention

