

Information for families and carers

Preventing choking on food

Children under 4 years of age

Children of any age can choke on food, but children under 4 years are most at risk because they:

- > do not have back teeth to chew and grind food
- > are still learning to eat, chew, and swallow.

Gagging is different to choking. Gagging is a normal part of learning to eat chewable foods. It is a normal response and children recover quickly. Children should gag less as their chewing skills develop.



How to make eating safer

- > Do not give food or drink to children when they are running, playing, laughing or crying.
- > Always sit children down to eat.
- > Stay close and watch children while they eat.
- > Never force children to eat.
- > Encourage children to eat slowly and chew well.
- > Encourage children to feed themselves.



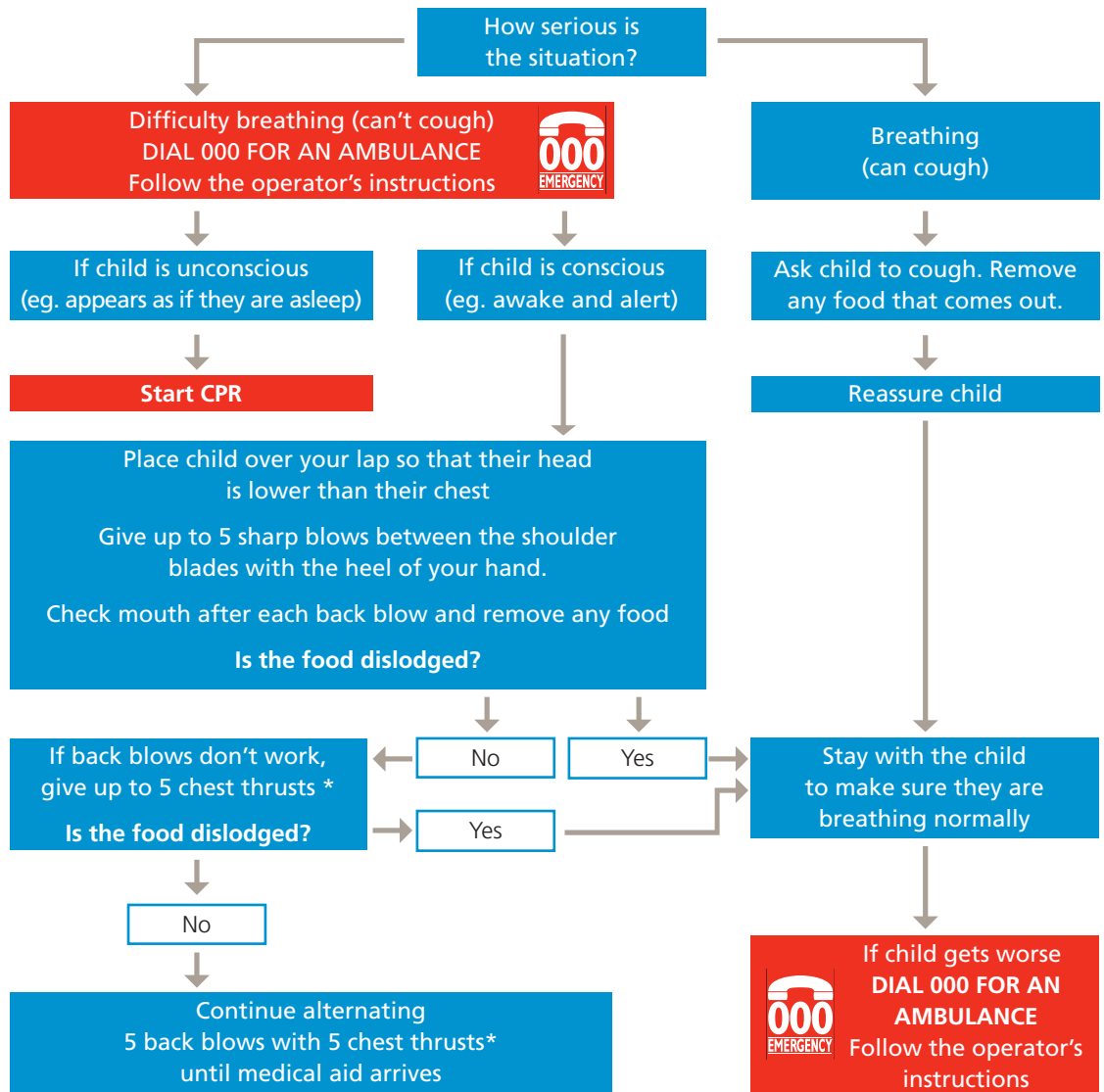
How to make food safer to eat for children under 4 years of age

Type of food	Examples	How to modify to make food safer
Foods with skins	Sausages, hotdogs, frankfurts.	Remove skins, cut lengthwise, and then into small pieces.
Round foods	Grapes and cherry tomatoes.	Cut in half.
Foods with seeds, pips and stones	Cherries, stone fruit, olives.	Remove seeds, pips and stones and cut into small pieces.
Foods that are hard, crunchy or stringy	Hard fruit and vegetables such as raw apple, carrot and celery.	Grate, very finely slice, cook or mash.
	Corn chips, popcorn, nuts, and hard or sticky lollies. Very hard crackers that don't dissolve or break up easily.	Don't serve these.
Foods that are tough and chewy	Meat with gristle and bone.	Remove fat, gristle and bone. Cut into small pieces.
	Tough meat.	Mince, shred or slow cook.
Foods containing small bones	Fish, chicken.	Remove bones and cut into small pieces.



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What to do if a child chokes on food



*For chest thrusts find the same compression point as you would for CPR.

Chest thrusts are similar to chest compressions but sharper, and given at a slower pace, whilst the patient is sitting or standing. Infants (< 1 year) should be placed on a firm surface on their back with their head low.

Useful contacts

- > St John Ambulance (SA) – Ph. 1300 360 455, www.stjohnsa.com.au
- > Australian Red Cross (SA) – Ph. 8100 4500, www.redcross.org.au/sa
- > Kidsafe SA – Ph. 8161 6318, www.kidsafesa.com.au
- > Parent Helpline – Ph. 1300 364 100, www.cyh.com and click on the link to Parenting and Child Health.

For more information

If a child has a chewing or swallowing problem then talk to a doctor or speech pathologist.

This resource was revised with input from Start Right-Eat Right, Kidsafe SA, SA Dental Service, and the Children, Youth and Women's Health Service.

