

Choking

Safer Eating

“Tragically a child dies in the UK every month from choking and hundreds more require hospital treatment. It can happen quickly and it can happen to anyone.”

September 2026

It is important that practitioners know how to prepare foods safely to help prevent choking, but also how to respond to a choking incident. The EYFS requires providers to take all necessary steps to keep children safe and well and must be confident that those responsible for preparing and handling food are competent to do so.

Statutory Requirements

The Statutory Requirements for the Group and school-based providers EYFS 2025 now states that:

3.63 Whilst children are eating there should always be a member of staff in the room with a valid paediatric first aid certificate for a full course consistent with the criteria set out in Annex A.

3.66 Providers must have ongoing discussions with parents and/or carers about the stage their child is at in regard to introducing solid foods, including to understand the textures the child is familiar with. Assumptions must not be made based on age. Providers must prepare food in a suitable way for each child's individual developmental needs.

3.67 Providers must prepare food in a way to prevent choking. This guidance on food safety for young children: Food safety - Help for early years providers - GOV.UK (education.gov.uk) includes advice on food and drink to avoid, how to reduce the risk of choking and links to other useful resources for early years providers.

3.69 Children must always be within sight and hearing of a member of staff whilst eating. Choking can be completely silent, therefore, it is important for providers to be alert to when a child may be starting to choke. Where possible, providers should sit facing children whilst they eat, so they can make sure children are eating in a way to prevent choking and so they can prevent food sharing and be aware of any unexpected allergic reactions.

Food choice and Preparation

You should consider the age and stage of a child when choosing appropriate snacks and meals. Choking can happen with any foods but firm foods, bones and small round foods that can easily get stuck in the throat present a higher risk. The Food Standards Agency has produced a poster which outlines essential steps to prevent choking. They have also produced a table which details key foods and advice for how to serve them safely. CAPT (Child Accident Prevention Trust) have a poster Finger Food without the Fear. RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) also have a poster on Choking hazards in the home. Both can be printed and displayed in your setting and shared with parents.

Snack and mealtimes can be incredibly busy in settings and often coincide with staff breaks. You must ensure children are adequately supervised at all times whilst eating. All children should be seated appropriately and never left alone whilst eating, this includes bottle feeding. Children should not be walking around whilst eating, the rules and expectations of the setting should reflect this.



Food and Drink

3.62 Where children are provided with meals, snacks, and drinks, these must be healthy, balanced and nutritious. To understand how to meet this requirement, providers must have regard to the 'Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance'. Fresh drinking water must always be available and accessible to children.



Curiosity Confidence Courage Constancy

Preparing Food safely for Young Children

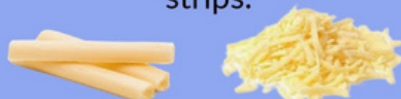
Information and guidance on preparing and serving food to reduce the risk of choking.



Cut food into batons:

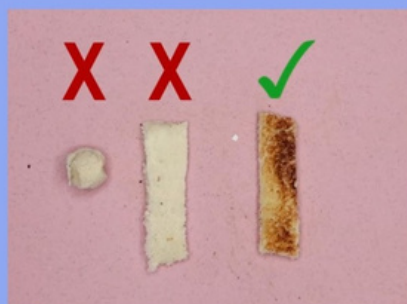
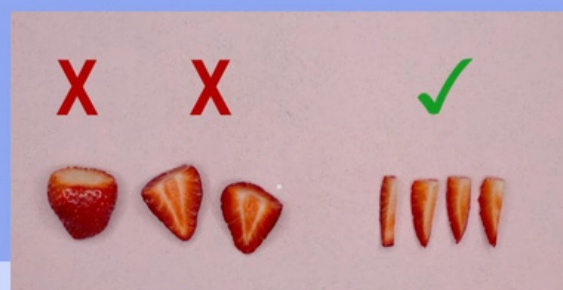
Avoid chunks of food, cut food into narrow batons to make them safer and more manageable.

Cheese: avoid chunks. Grate or cut into short narrow strips.



Cut round foods into quarters:

Cut round foods, like cherries, tomatoes, grapes, and berries, length ways and then quarters.



White bread:

this can form a ball shape of dough like texture in the throat.
Lightly toast white bread or use brown bread instead.
Always cut bread into batons.

Peel skin:

Peel skin off fruit and vegetables to make it easier to chew and swallow.



Pips & stones:

Always remove pips and stones from fruit.



Avoid these foods:



Seating:

Sit child safely in an appropriately sized low chair while eating.
NEVER leave children alone while eating.



For more guidance

SCAN ME

