



# Choking & Strangulation

safekids  
Aotearoa

Starship  
Foundation



Babies and young children learn about their world through touch and taste. It is natural for them to put things in their mouths. As soon as they are able to reach and grasp, they will taste whatever they can touch – and it won't just be food. Batteries, balloons, pills, earrings, marbles, coins, toys and magnets, will all go into their mouths.

Children have small airways that can be blocked by objects much easier than adults. They also have smaller teeth and are still learning to chew and swallow properly. This means they are at risk of swallowing and choking on food that hasn't been broken down into small enough pieces. The danger is even greater because their small lungs are not very good at shifting or clearing objects that get caught in their airways.

Choking and strangulation injuries are less common than other injuries but tend to be fatal. When oxygen flow to the lungs is reduced or blocked completely, brain damage can occur in as little as four to six minutes. A serious choking, suffocation or strangulation injury can affect a child for the rest of their life, both physically and mentally, often causing irreversible brain and organ damage.

**40** Around **40** children hospitalised each year.

**87%** were due to choking.

**11%** were due to strangulation.

## THE CAUSES



### SUFFOCATION CAUSED BY CHOKING

Nearly half of all suffocation injuries are caused by choking on food and other objects, particularly for children under 1 year.



### SMALL OBJECTS

Choking from small objects such as balloons, earrings, small toy parts and button batteries.



### WINDOW CORDS & STRINGS

Strangulation injuries from window cords and strings.

## WHO IS GETTING INJURED?



### 0-4 YEARS

Account for around 90% of choking and strangulation injuries.



### BOYS

Boys are at a slightly higher risk than girls.



### MĀORI & PACIFIC

Are 1.5 times more likely to be hospitalised than other ethnicities.

## SAFETY DEVICES



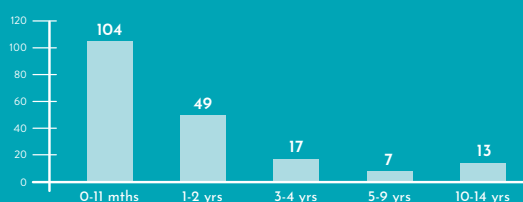
- Designing, constructing and using materials for cots, folding cots and high chairs that minimise entrapment.
- Ensuring toys for under 3 year olds do not have small parts that can be pulled off or break off easily.
- Choking test tube, or toilet roll tube.

## WHERE IT HAPPENS



70% choking and strangulation events requiring hospitalisations happen at home.

## HOSPITALISATIONS 2013-2017



## THE TREND



The rate of hospitalisation for choking and strangulation events in the home has declined by about 17% over the past 10 years.

## Top Safety Tips

### Birth to 11 months

- Mash, grate and finely chop foods so they are easier to eat and won't get caught in a baby's airways.
- Feed your baby before they go to sleep rather than letting them fall asleep with a bottle. Babies who fall asleep while bottle-feeding or with the teat in their mouth can draw liquid into their lungs and inhale or choke on it.
- As well as leading to choking, button batteries can also result in severe burning of the throat. Place them out of reach and sight and keep loose batteries locked away.

### 1-2 years

- Always make sure babies and young children sit down while they eat, and that someone is with them while they are eating or drinking.
- Offer food that matches their chewing and grinding abilities.
- Be aware of foods which are more likely to cause choking, such as nuts, seeds, berries, raw apple and carrot, food with skins such as grape and stringy foods such as celery.
- Keep beds away from windows and make sure cords and strings are tied up and out of reach.
- Make sure window cords and strings are tied up and out of reach. They are a risk at this age, so keep beds away from windows cords too.
- Cut food into small pieces. It's a lot easier to eat and reduces choking
- Plastic bags that can fit over a child's head can cause suffocation, so keep these out of reach.

Visit [kidshealth.org.nz/choking-checklist](https://kidshealth.org.nz/choking-checklist) for detailed information about reducing the choking risk for children.

#### First aid

The first aid procedures for helping a child who is choking are different for very small babies and children over the age of 1 year of age.

You can find very useful description of these procedures in the Well Child Tamariki Ora My Health Book.

Visit [healthed.govt.nz](https://healthed.govt.nz)

If your child is injured you can find out more about ACC support at [www.acc.co.nz/im-injured](https://www.acc.co.nz/im-injured).

ACC Claims: 0800 101 996 or email [claims@acc.co.nz](mailto:claims@acc.co.nz).

For detailed references on the data and information contained in this card and to download additional copies visit [www.starship.org.nz/safekids/reference-cards](https://www.starship.org.nz/safekids/reference-cards).