

Prevent Choking

Tips on eating safely



As we age, some elderly persons would have an increased choking risk due to decreased oral muscle control and delayed swallowing reflex. Symptoms include choking while eating or drinking, or residual food inside the mouth. If severe, it can lead to aspiration pneumonia, malnutrition or even death.

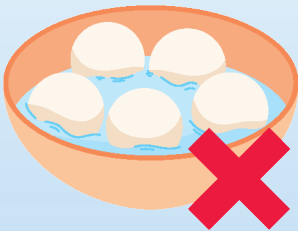
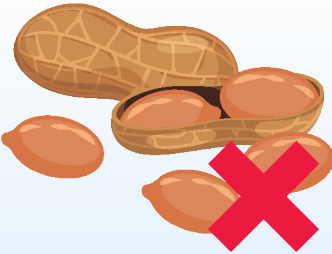
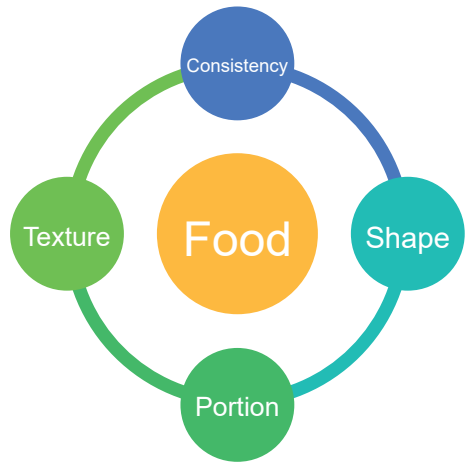
Both elderly persons and their carers have to be aware of the swallowing safety tips so that they can eat happily and safely.



Tip 1 The characteristics of food

Consistency

- ▲ Semi-solid food with thicker consistency, such as congee, can lower the risk of choking for people with dysphagia
- ▲ Be careful when drinking fluid like water, tea or juice, be slow and steady.
- ▲ Thickener could be added to liquid for elderly persons with choking risk



Texture

- ▲ Foods that are too hard or chewy such as peanuts and nuts are more difficult to chew
- ▲ Sticky food such as glutinous rice dumplings could block the airway
- ▲ Slippery foods such as jelly and konjac jelly could slip into the throat accidentally
- ▲ Therefore, elderly persons need to be careful and cut the above food into small pieces as well as chew these foods thoroughly before swallowing
- ▲ Foods with mixed texture, such as soup and rice in soup, could pose higher choking risk due to different flow rate after entering the throat. Elderly persons should eat these foods bit by bit slowly

Shape

- ▲ Round-shaped foods such as fish balls, hard candies, grapes etc could be lodged in the throat and occlude the airway
- ▲ Elderly persons could cut these foods into half to lower the risk



Portion

- ▲ Don't put too much foods into the mouth at a time
- ▲ Use a smaller spoon when eating
- ▲ Cut large food items into smaller pieces



Tip 2 Eating posture

- ▲ The height of chair and table should be appropriate
- ▲ Don't eat while lying down
- ▲ Slightly tuck in your chin and tilt your head forward to prevent aspiration
- ▲ Don't go to bed until at least 2-3 hours after meal to prevent gastroesophageal reflux



Tip 3 Eating environment

- ▲ The environment should be well-lit, tidy and quiet
- ▲ Avoid talking while eating
- ▲ Focus on eating, don't watch TV or read newspaper while eating
- ▲ Put on glasses and denture if needed
- ▲ Take your time, don't gobble
- ▲ If you choke, stop eating and try to cough out the food immediately



**If elderly choke frequently while eating,
please seek medical advice
as soon as possible.**

