**Implementing the Ministry of Health’s guidance on reducing food-related choking in early learning services – Q&As on specific foods**

This resource provides responses to common queries that the Ministry of Health has received about specific foods and how to prepare them in accordance with the *‘Reducing food-related choking for babies and young children at early learning services’* guidance. This resource is intended for early learning service providers.

1. **What is a ‘hard rice cracker’? What about other types of crackers?**

Most rice crackers are hard. These pose a risk of choking because they break into hard sharp pieces which can become stuck in children’s airways. Crackers that are made from puffed rice or other puffed grains, such as rice cakes or corn thins, are unlikely to pose a choking risk and can be provided.

Other types of crackers and biscuits can be provided. Easy-to-chew crackers that melt in the mouth and require minimal chewing are recommended. Test the cracker by breaking it down in your mouth using your tongue and hard palate (roof of mouth) only.

1. **What about hard bread crusts?**

Bread with crusts can be provided as they are unlikely to pose a choking risk.

1. **What constitutes a piece of nut? Are ground nuts and seeds ok?**

Small hard foods, such as nuts, are more commonly associated with choking incidents. Therefore, whole nuts or pieces of nuts should not be given to young children (ages 1-6 years). Ground nuts and seeds may be provided. For example, chopping nuts and seeds in a food processor before using in baking.

1. **Is dried fruit acceptable if finely chopped up in a food processor? Or fruit leather in very small pieces?**

No. Dried fruit and fruit leathers are very concentrated sources of sticky sugar and are generally not recommended by the Ministry because they promote tooth decay.

1. **Do stone fruits have to be cooked? Or, is removing the skin and stone of ripe fruit, then chopping into small pieces acceptable?**

Stone fruit can be prepared by removing the stone from the ripe fruit and then chopping the fruit into small pieces. The skin does not need to be removed.

The guidance recommends for children aged 1-3 years, chopping to an 8mm x 8mm size or smaller, which is about half the width of a standard dinner fork.

For children aged 4-6 years, prepare fruit in the same way as for children aged 1-3 years or cut into sticks that can be picked up with one hand (approximately 4-6cm long).

1. **What are the instructions for mandarins and oranges?**

These are categorised as ‘fibrous and stringy foods’. To reduce the risk of choking, peel the skin and strong fibres then slice these foods thinly across the grain of fibres.

1. **Tomatoes appear twice, once under ‘Small round food’ and once under ‘Food with skin or leaves’. Can they just be chopped up?**

Tomatoes fall into two categories of foods that increase choking risk. These include small round or oval foods (cherry tomato), and foods with skins or leaves (both cherry and standard tomatoes).

For young children (ages 1-6 years), the guidance recommends quartering a cherry tomato or finely chopping a tomato to an 8mm x 8mm size or smaller, which is about half the width of a standard dinner fork.

1. **What are the instructions for lettuce and other raw salad leaves?**

For young children (ages 1-6 years), the guidance recommends to finely slice or chop raw salad leaves, lettuce, spinach and cabbage.

1. **What are the instructions for corn? What about corn on the cob?**

Corn is categorised as a ‘small round or oval food’. For children aged 1-3 years, corn must be cooked and squashed with a fork before serving. For children aged 4-6 years, corn can be served as whole kernels (without squashing) or as corn on the cob.

1. **What are the instructions for legumes like chickpeas and beans? Does it make a difference if they are canned?**

Legumes, including chickpeas and beans, are categorised as a ‘small round or oval food’.

For children aged 1-3 years, legumes must be cooked and squashed with a fork before serving. For children aged 4-6 years, legumes can be served cooked without squashing.

Canned legumes are already cooked, but please ensure that they are soft (easily compressible between the tongue and roof of mouth) before serving to all children, and additionally squashed with a fork before serving to children aged 1-3 years.

1. **Do apples, carrots and other hard vegetables and fruits need to be grated/spiralised/sliced and cooked (for children age 1-3 years)?**

No. The guidance provides different options for altering small hard foods to reduce the risk of choking. For these foods you can either grate, spiralise, slice or cook them.

1. **Is it okay to serve sushi?**

For children aged 1-3 years, we recommend avoiding sushi as it contains ingredients that pose a choking risk, such as seaweed.

For children aged 4-6 years, sushi is okay to be served as it normally would.

1. **I am an early learning services provider, who can I contact for more information or support with the recommendations?**

For questions related to meeting licensing criteria and education regulations related to reducing food-related choking, early learning services can contact their regional Ministry of Education office.

* Contact information for regional Ministry of Education offices is available on the Ministry of Education webpage: <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/contact-us/regional-ministry-contacts/>

For questions related to food preparation and nutrition advice, early learning services can contact their local public health unit and ask for a Healthy Active Learning team member.

* Contact information for public health units is available on the Ministry of Health webpage: <https://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/key-health-sector-organisations-and-people/public-health-units/public-health-unit-contacts>

**Appendix: List of resources relating to reducing food-related choking**

* *Reducing food-related choking for babies and young children at early learning services* containing the Ministry of Health’s recommendations (in seven languages) and Q&As can be found at: <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/reducing-food-related-choking-babies-and-young-children-early-learning-services>
* *Reducing food-related choking for babies and young children at early learning services* printable pamphlet for parents/caregivers can be found at: <https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/licensing-and-regulations/the-regulatory-framework-for-ece/licensing-criteria/centre-based-ece-services/health-and-safety/food-and-drink/hs22-supervision-while-eating/#tab-1>
* *Licensing criteria for ECE services* can be found at:<https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/licensing-and-regulations/the-regulatory-framework-for-ece/licensing-criteria/>
* *Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008* can be found at: <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2008/0204/latest/whole.html#DLM1412637>
* *Healthy food and drink guidance – early learning services* can be found at: <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/healthy-food-and-drink-guidance-early-learning-services>