

Gagging in Babies and Children

Gagging

Gagging is a natural reflex and is common for babies and children learning to eat solid foods. Gagging can be quite scary for parents to witness. However, gagging is a part of the process for children beginning to understand the size, taste, textures and shape of food as they learn to safely swallow.

When you start feeding solids around 6 months, your baby's gag reflex is located more towards the front of the mouth. It will move farther back in the throat as they age. As your child explores food and learns to eat, the reflex becomes less sensitive and gagging will normally improve. Occasionally a child might vomit as a result of gagging.

To help avoid gagging, make sure your child's first foods are of a texture that is appropriate to their stage of development. Ensure your child is ready to eat and avoid forcing them to eat.

Although an uncomfortable experience, in most cases gagging is not associated with an underlying medical concern and will improve over time.

When to Worry About Gagging

- If you see signs of distress (frequent coughing, some colour changes around the lips or eyes, or changes in breathing patterns).
- If your child experiences frequent upper respiratory infections.
- If your child consistently gags multiple times per meal or regularly on specific foods or textures.

If you are worried, talk to your doctor about any of these signs and how often they happen. Your doctor may refer you to a feeding specialist. The feeding specialist can help determine if the gagging is the result of a difficulty coordinating mouth movements or a sign of a swallowing problem.



Gagging is a natural reflex that all healthy babies have. It tends to disappear as your child ages.

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What to Do if Your Child Gags

- Avoid using your fingers to remove food from their mouth. This can push the food farther back and can cause the food to get stuck in their throat.
- Stay calm. Avoid reacting if possible. Your child can feel your stress and anxiety.
- Watch your child quietly to ensure they are not choking.
- Wait and see if your child is comfortable and continues eating.
- Sometimes a child will bring up the food that caused them to gag.

Choking

Choking is **not** the same as gagging. Choking is life threatening and can happen when a piece of food blocks the flow of air in the throat making it hard to breathe. If your child is choking, they may be open-mouthed, wide-eyed, have a panicked look, be drooling, and may have bluish skin around the lips or eyes. Sometimes the throat is partially blocked, so you may hear some gasping for air or quiet noises from your child. Sometimes they may not make a sound.

Choking may require you to intervene if they can't breathe, cough or make sounds. If you are worried about your child's breathing, call 911. First aid and CPR training are available to parents and will address what to do when a child does choke.

For additional information on choking rescue, go to <https://myhealth.alberta.ca> and search for '[choke](#)'.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at **811**.

This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction, or treatment. If you have questions, talk with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.