



## Parenting

# Avoiding toy hazards

## Protect your child from choking, falls, and more

Each year, toy-related injuries send over 150,000 kids in the U.S. to emergency rooms—nearly half of them under age 4. Babies and toddlers are most at risk for choking, while older kids are more likely to get hurt in falls and accidents. A guide to the biggest risks:

### Choking: The #1 danger

The good news: 97 percent of children seen in emergency rooms for toy-related injuries are treated and released. However, for some kids, these injuries—most often from choking or suffocation—are fatal. For those under 4, watch out for:

- **Stuffed animals or dolls** with small parts, like eyes made of buttons, that can be pulled loose.
- **Crib or 6oor toys with a cord** or string, which can wrap around a baby's neck and strangle him.
- **Toys sold or given away at a carnival or fair** and in vending machines; they may not be labeled as choking hazards.
- **Balloons.** Don't let kids play with them unattended until age 8. If one pops and a child puts it in his mouth, it could

block breathing.

- **The shrink-wrap and all the plastic straps and bolts** used to package toys; they're choking hazards.

- **Button batteries.**

They're in everything from greeting cards to handheld electronic toys. Even if a child swallows one without choking, the electric currents can damage the esophagus. If you suspect your child has swallowed one, get him to the emergency room immediately—removing it may require surgery.



### What to do if your child is choking

- **If she's gagging,** coughing, crying, or talking, don't do anything—chances are she'll cough up what she swallowed.

- **If her lips turn blue** or she can't swallow, talk, cry, or breathe, call 911. (If you know emergency procedures, get another adult to call 911 while you start them; if you're

alone, start rescue procedures for one minute, then call 911.)

- **Don't try to get any object out** of your child's mouth or nose with your 5nger unless you can see it (you might push it in farther).

- **After a choking episode—especially if you**

didn't see the object come out, or if she's still pointing to her throat—bring her to the doctor.

- **Before an emergency,** take a CPR and 5rst-aid course. To 5nd a class, contact your local Red Cross. (To learn more, log on to [Parenting.com](http://Parenting.com) and search for "how to save a choking child.")

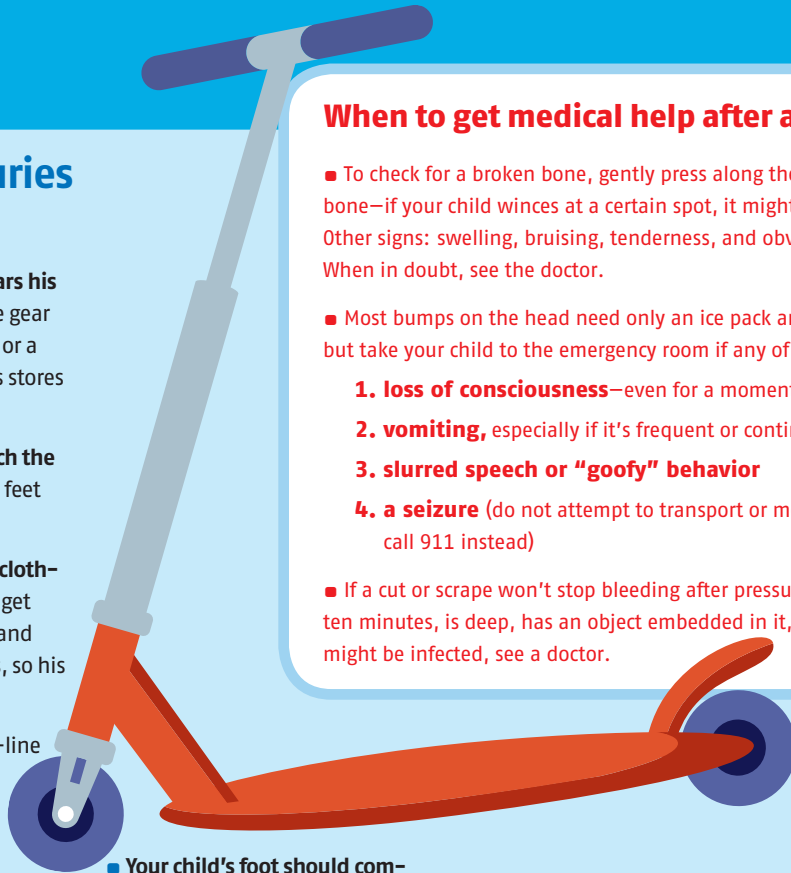
### The toilet paper roll test

If a toy or toy part can fit through here, a child under age 4 can choke on it. Especially dangerous: rubber balls.

## Riding-toy injuries

To keep your child safe:

- **Make sure he always wears his helmet** and other protective gear on a bike, a scooter, skates, or a skateboard; sporting-goods stores can help you get a good fit.
- **He should be able to touch the ground** with the balls of his feet when he sits on a bike seat.
- **He shouldn't wear loose clothing or scarves**, which could get caught in the bike's pedals and choke him; also, no sandals, so his feet stay on the pedals.
- **Have your child try on in-line skates with socks.** If you can squeeze the plastic around the ankle, it's not supportive enough.
- **Teach her to crouch down** if she loses her balance on a skateboard, so she doesn't have as far to fall.
- **Look for wide wheels** on scooters (thin ones will make it go too fast) and handlebars at the right height: For good balance, her elbows should bend at a 90-degree angle.
- **Watch out for inclines, bumps, and stairways.**



## When to get medical help after a fall

- To check for a broken bone, gently press along the length of the bone—if your child winces at a certain spot, it might be a fracture. Other signs: swelling, bruising, tenderness, and obvious deformity. When in doubt, see the doctor.
- Most bumps on the head need only an ice pack and some TLC, but take your child to the emergency room if any of these occur:
  1. **loss of consciousness**—even for a moment
  2. **vomiting**, especially if it's frequent or continuous
  3. **slurred speech or "goofy" behavior**
  4. **a seizure** (do not attempt to transport or move your child; call 911 instead)
- If a cut or scrape won't stop bleeding after pressure is applied for ten minutes, is deep, has an object embedded in it, or looks like it might be infected, see a doctor.

- **Your child's foot should comfortably reach** the accelerator pedal in a battery-powered ride-on car. Be sure it's on the lowest speed the 5<sup>th</sup> time she tries it.

- **Always supervise.** Until a child is at least 10, he'll need to be with an adult to ride in the street.

- **Set a strict driveway safety rule:** When a car is about to pull into or out of the driveway, everyone move to the front door or stoop.

## Smart toy habits

- **Throw out (or repair) broken toys.** Look for ripped seams on soft toys, where small parts could be exposed; splinters or chipped paint on wooden toys; rust on outdoor playthings.
- **Respect the age range.** Your 2-year-old may well be gifted, but "for children 3 and up" doesn't refer to intelligence; it's a rating designed to prevent choking and other physical hazards.
- **Teach your child to put toys away:** Less to trip over!



## The noise factor

Loud toys can put your child at risk for hearing loss. **Toy noise and music should be no louder than 90 decibels**—about as loud as a blender—and **70 decibels** if it's meant to be held close to the ear (a typical doorbell rings at 80 decibels).

## Recall alert

To check on recalled and dangerous toys, go to [Parenting.com/recalls](http://Parenting.com/recalls). You'll get updates from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and toy manufacturers.

SOURCES: Gary Smith, M.D., chair of the committee on injury, violence, and poison prevention for the American Academy of Pediatrics; Mark Romness, M.D., University of Virginia Medical Center in Charlottesville, VA; Alice Hunter, M.D., Lahey Clinic in Burlington, MA; [kidswheels.com](http://kidswheels.com); National Safe Kids Campaign; National Safety Council; The New York Public Interest Research Group.