

Choosing safe toys for children

Toys play an essential role in your child's development and are supposed to be fun, but each year many children are treated in hospital emergency departments for toy-related injuries. Kids ages 3 and younger are especially at risk for choking because they tend to put objects in their mouths. Here are some tips to help you choose safe toys for your child:

- Consider your child's age. Select toys to suit his or her abilities and interests.
- Follow toy labels. Information on age recommendations, instructions for how to play with the toy, assembly and requirements for adult supervision can be included.
- Check for quality design and construction. Are there small parts that are likely to come off after being dropped?
- Is the toy easy to clean? Toys should be cleaned to help get rid of dirt and germs at least once a month by being sprayed down with a spray bottle mixture of hot water and an antibacterial soap and then rinsed with water. Stuffed toys should be washable.
- Avoid toys that are too loud. Some toys, even those recommended for young children, can produce noise at a level that could damage your child's hearing. Children tend to put noisy toys (for example a pretend phone) directly up to their ears, which can expose them to damaging doses of sound.
- Ensure toys are put away on shelves or in a safe toy chest after playing to prevent trips and falls. Use a toy box with a lid that will stay open in any position it is raised to so it will not unexpectedly fall on your child. Also, for extra safety make sure there are ventilation holes for fresh air and that it does not have a lock.
- Watch for rust on older or outside toys and be sure wooden toys will not leave splinters. Always throw away any broken or worn toys immediately.
- Beware that stuffed animals and other toys sold or given away at carnivals, fairs and in vending machines are not required to meet safety standards
- Remember that video games rated T-Teen have content that is unsuitable for children under age 13. Stick with games rated either EC-Early Childhood or E-Everyone.

Reporting of unsafe toys:

Toy recalls are posted to the CPSC website at www.cpsc.gov. You can sign up to have toy recall updates sent directly to your email at this site as well. Call the CPSC hotline at 800-638-CPSC to report any toy you think is unsafe.

Healthy Recipe: White Chocolate Bark

- 1 cup sliced almonds (optional for nut allergies)
- ¼ cup unsweetened coconut
- 1 cup rice cereal
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 1 ½ pounds white chocolate, chopped
- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees
2. Spread almonds (optional) and coconut in an even layer on baking sheet and toast 8 minutes in the oven; let cool
3. Combine coconut, rice cereal, almonds (optional) and dried cranberries. Reserve ¼ cup of mixture and set aside.
4. Place chopped white chocolate and vegetable oil in large heatproof bowl and set over a medium saucepan on simmering water. Stir until chocolate is melted.
5. Remove chocolate from heat and fold in coconut mixture. Spread evenly onto parchment-lined baking sheet. Sprinkle with reserved ¼ cup mixture to top and refrigerate for 30 minutes. Break bark into small pieces to serve.

Activity: Snow Hurdles

Build a course of snow hurdles by lightly packing a bunch of basket-ball sized snowballs to jump over, run around, or step on. If in a group, have children follow each other, doing the same as the person in front as in the game of follow the leader.

Mercy Children's Center provides pediatric services to children of all ages, from infants to teenagers. Services offered include: pediatric clinics, dedicated emergency and trauma services, specialists, inpatient and intensive care, neonatal intensive care, rehabilitation and behavioral health. For more information, contact Mercy Children's Center at 1-888-882-4122 or by visiting www.mercydesmoines.org.

