

What should I do if someone is choking?

Choking happens when someone's airway suddenly gets blocked, either fully or partly, so they can't breathe. This information applies to adults and children over 1 year old. This does not apply to children 0-1 years, or pregnant women.

Mild choking: encourage them to cough.

If the airway is only partly blocked, the person will usually be able to speak, cry, cough or breathe. They will usually be able to clear the blockage themselves.

To help with mild choking in an adult or child over 1 year old:

- Encourage them to keep coughing to try to clear the blockage.
- Ask them to try to spit out the object if it's in their mouth.
- Don't put your fingers in their mouth to help them as they may bite you accidentally.

If coughing does not work, start back blows. Except for children 0-1 years. (See *next section*)

Severe choking: back blows and abdominal thrusts.

Where choking is severe, **the person will not be able to speak**, cry, cough or breathe. Without help, they will eventually become unconscious.

To carry out a back blow on an adult or child over 1 year old:

- Stand behind them and slightly to one side. Support their chest with one hand. Lean them forward so the object blocking their airway will come out of their mouth, rather than moving further down.
- Give up to 5 sharp blows between their shoulder blades with the heel of your hand. The heel is between the palm of your hand and your wrist. Except children 0-1 years
- Check if the blockage has cleared.
- If not, give up to 5 abdominal thrusts, if trained. Except for on pregnant women. (See *next section*)

Abdominal thrusts:

Don't give abdominal thrusts to babies under 1 year old or pregnant women.

To carry out an abdominal thrust:

- Stand behind the person who is choking.
- Place your arms around their waist and bend them forward.
- Clench 1 fist and place it right above their belly button.
- Put the other hand on top of your fist and pull sharply inwards and upwards.
- Repeat this movement up to 5 times.
- If the person's airway is still blocked after trying back blows and abdominal thrusts, get help immediately:

- Call 999 and ask for an ambulance. Tell the 999 operator the person is choking.
- Continue with the cycles of 5 back blows and 5 abdominal thrusts until help arrives.
- If they lose consciousness and are not breathing, you should begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) with chest compressions.

Sources of information

National website

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4731 (direct dial) or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 0300 131 4434 Email: esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:
Dr Shayma Habeeb, Consultant, Emergency Medicine and Dr Simon Merritt, Chief Medical Officer Medical

The directorate group that have agreed this patient information leaflet:
Cardiology

Next review date: February 2025
Responsible clinician/author: Shayma Habeeb, Consultant

© East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust – www.esht.nhs.uk