

Choking (asphyxia) is defined as:

'Severe difficulty in breathing due to constricted or obstructed throat'

E.g. food items, sweets, small toys, toy fragments, coins, beads, buttons, jewellery, balloons.

Young children especially are prone to choking. A child may choke on food, or may put small objects into their mouth and cause a blockage of the airway. If the blockage of the airway is mild, the casualty should be able to clear it. If it is severe they will be unable to speak, cough, or breathe and will eventually lose consciousness, which could result in death.

A child in the UK dies every month from choking and hundreds more require hospital treatment. It can happen quickly and it can happen to anyone. Babies and toddlers are most at risk because they examine things around them by putting them in their mouths.



Recent cases: (2012 & 2013)

- A 9 month old died after choking on food
- A 22 month died choking on a jelly cube during messy play
- A 10 month old child died after choking on a small piece of apple

Guidelines to reduce choking

1. Closely supervise children when eating (both meal and snack times)
2. Encourage children to sit whilst eating
3. Ensure food is appropriate for and prepared for the correct age group (Cutting up or portioning should be specific to the age and need of the specific child)
4. Maintain a physical hazard-free environment (coins, jewellery & other small objects to be stored in a staff locker)
5. Carry out daily risk assessments on resources that are available to children. Pay special attention to loose parts and give consideration to the consequences resulting from any resource becoming damaged
6. Only adults should inflate balloons and children should be supervised around balloons
7. Supervise all activity carefully including craft type activities (small loose items). Ensure active supervision during craft activities
8. Consider how staff deployment during free flow activities offers the maximum supervision for children.

Prevention RoSPA Guidelines

1. Choose toys appropriate to the age of the child
2. Ensure that small objects such as marbles and peanuts and small toys are kept out of reach of children under three years old
3. Pull cords on curtains and blinds should be kept short and kept out of reach
4. Keep nappy sacks out of the reach of babies and young children
5. Never store nappy sacks in or around the cot or pram.

You could also consider:

1. Ensure children who are falling asleep do not continue to eat and that they do not have food in their mouths when put to sleep
2. Never let children run with objects in their mouths
3. Be vigilant during free flow activities and ensure that all children are within sight of a practitioner at all times.

Choking treatment for infants / young children

Mild Choking – (struggling and coughing moderately)

- Keep them calm
- Allow or encourage them to cough
- Keep checking for loose objects in the mouth (don't blindly stick your fingers in)

Severe Choking – (severe breathing difficulty, cannot cry or make noise, lips/face changing colour)

- **Lay them face down** on your thigh or across your arm, **head facing downwards**
- **Deliver (up to) 5 back blows** (with the heel of one hand between the shoulder blades)
- Check for loose objects in the mouth

And if this DOES NOT work...

- **Deliver (up to) 5 abdominal thrusts** (Place two fingers on the breastbone, one finger's breadth below the nipple line, and push inwards and upwards towards the head)
- **Call 999 and continue** to repeat cycles of back blows and abdominal thrusts

To reiterate an earlier point this should only be attempted in an emergency where no other better trained first aider is immediately available. If there's no help imminent and it's down to you, keep calm and take decisive action. Moderate the amount of force used to the age and size of the child, follow these instructions.



Image courtesy of the British Red Cross

Choking treatment for adults

Mild Choking – (Struggling and coughing moderately)

1. Keep them calm
2. Encourage them to cough (body's natural choking defence)
3. Keep checking for any loose objects in the mouth.

Severe Choking – (Severe difficulty breathing, face changing to red/purple/grey)

1. **Get them into position** on knees or bent over
2. **Deliver (up to) 5 back blows** (with palm of the hand to the upper back between shoulder blades)
3. Check for any loose objects in the mouth.

And if this DOES NOT work...

4. **Deliver (up to) 5 abdominal thrusts** (stand behind them, link hands and pull/squeeze them sharply. This is commonly known as a Heimlich manoeuvre)
5. **Call 999 and continue** to repeat cycles of back blows and abdominal thrusts.

Toy safety

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), recommends that you look for the official European Community (CE) symbol on a toy. This is a claim by the suppliers that their toy meets the requirements of the EC Toy Safety Directive. Look also for the British Toy Manufacturers Association Lion Mark. One of the requirements of this trade association is that members' toys will meet the safety requirements.



RoSPA's top 10 safety tips on toy safety

1. Buy toys only from recognised outlets
2. Make sure the toy is suitable for the child, check the age range
3. Be particularly careful with toys for children under three
4. Be wary of young children playing with older children's toys
5. Check for loose hair and small parts, sharp edges and points
6. Ensure that garden swings and slides are robust and are not a strangulation hazard
7. Check toys regularly for wear and repair or dispose of them where necessary
8. Keep the play area tidy
9. Follow the instructions and warnings provided with toys
10. Supervise young children at play.

Links and resources:

- <https://www.sja.org.uk/sja/first-aid-advice/breathing-problems/choking.aspx>
- <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/helping-choking-baby.aspx> (good video)
- <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/>
- <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Managing%20Medicines%20Nov%2007%20version.pdf>
- <http://www.food.gov.uk/policy-advice/allergyintol/#.UyxLwk1F2Uk>
- <http://allergytraining.food.gov.uk/english/food-allergy-facts.aspx>
- <http://www.health.harvard.edu/fhg/firstaid/heimlichInf.shtml>
- <http://www.health.harvard.edu/fhg/firstaid/heimlichChild.shtml>
- <http://www.leatherheadfood.com>
- <http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/First-aid/Baby-and-Child-First-Aid/Choking-baby>

National Day Nurseries Association

National Early Years Enterprise Centre, Longbow Close, Huddersfield. HD2 1GQ
Tel: 01484 40 70 70 Fax: 01484 40 70 60 email: info@ndna.org.uk www.ndna.org.uk
Company Limited by Guarantee Registered in England Company No: 3738616 VAT No: 758962567
NDNA is a registered charity in England and Wales (1078275) and Scotland (SC040610)