



Choking

Causes

- Food goes down the windpipe. Small objects get stuck in the throat and airway.
- Fluids, such as mucus or liquids, are swallowed the wrong way and block the airway.
- Snoring. Choking can occur when the tongue blocks the airway.

Treatment

Emergency action is needed for a person who cannot breathe, speak, or cough forcefully. The Heimlich maneuver can expel an object that blocks the airway. It is used for a person who is conscious. Emergency medical care is needed for a person who loses consciousness. Rescue breaths and chest compressions are needed before medical help arrives. Even if the object is expelled, the person should see a doctor or go to a hospital emergency department.

Questions to Ask

Is the person unconscious? Or, is the person choking and not breathing? {**Note:** While waiting for emergency medical care, give or have someone give **First Aid for Choking** at www.HealthyLearn.com.}

YES



NO

Does the person have any of these problems?

- A hard time swallowing. Fast and/or labored breathing.
- Persistent cough with a hard time breathing.
- Severe wheezing that doesn't go away.
- Drooling a lot. The person can't swallow saliva.
- Constant or unrelieved gagging.
- The feeling that something is stuck in the esophagus or throat.

YES



NO

Flowchart continued on next page

With **choking**, the airway is partly or completely blocked. When it is completely blocked, the brain doesn't get oxygen. Without oxygen, the brain can begin to die in 4 to 6 minutes.

Signs & Symptoms

When a person's airway is completely blocked, he or she:

- Can't talk.
- Can't breathe.
- Can't cough.
- May turn blue.

When a person's airway is partly blocked, he or she:

- Wheezes.
- Coughs.
- Has fast and/or labored breathing.
- Has chest pain when breathing in.



Choking, Continued

After a choking incident, does the person have wheezing, a cough that doesn't go away, chest pain when breathing in, and/or a fever?



Self-Care / First Aid

For **first aid for choking for a conscious and an unconscious person**, see at www.HealthyLearn.com.

First Aid for Choking When Able to Breathe and Speak (or an infant or child can cry)

- Cough to clear the airway.
- Take a slow, deep breath to get a lot of air into the lungs.
- Give a deep, forceful cough. Breathe in deeply enough to be able to cough out 2 or 3 times in a row before taking a second breath.
- Don't slap a person on the back. Doing this can drive the object down deeper.
- Have the person sit or stand. Bending forward may cause the object to fall against the vocal cords. Get emergency care right away!

Prevention

- Chew all foods well before swallowing. Eat at a slow pace.
- Limit alcoholic drinks before you eat. This lessens the chance of swallowing large pieces of food.
- If you wear dentures, make sure they fit well. Since your mouth sensation is lessened, you are at a higher risk of choking. Eat slower. Chew food more thoroughly.

- Try not to laugh and eat at the same time. Laughing can draw food into the windpipe.
- Don't run or play sports with objects in the mouth.
- For children under 5 years old, cut hot dogs, sausages, seedless grapes, and caramels into small pieces before you give these to them. And don't give them nuts; popcorn; foods with pits, (e.g., cherries); gum (especially bubble gum); hard candy, throat lozenges, and cough drops.
- Don't let your child chew or suck on rubber balloons or pieces of them.

- Keep small, solid objects, such as paper clips, away from children 3 years old and younger. Make sure, too, that they don't get toys that have small parts, such as eyes on stuffed animals, game pieces, dice, etc. A young child should not play with any object smaller than his or her closed fist.



Anything that is small enough to fit through the center of a paper towel roll is a choking hazard for babies and small children.

- Put childproof latches on cupboards that have harmful items.
- Store all medicines and vitamins out of children's reach and in containers with childproof lids. Keep these items in locked cabinets, if needed.
- Remove plastic labels and decals from baby walkers and other kiddy furniture before children can peel them off.