

# CHOKING: WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

## Every Second Counts — Know the Right Steps

Choking happens when an object, such as food, becomes stuck in the throat or airway, blocking the flow of air. In this situation, quick and calm action can save a life. This guide will help you recognise choking, respond safely, and know when to call for emergency help.

### How to Recognise Choking

A person who is choking may:

- Have difficulty speaking, breathing, or coughing
- Make high-pitched sounds or no sound at all
- Clutch their throat (the universal sign for choking)
- Have blue lips or face
- Appear panicked or distressed.

If the person can still talk, cry, or cough forcefully, encourage them to keep coughing — this may clear the blockage. If they cannot breathe, speak, or cough, act immediately.

### What to Do: Adults and Children (Over 1 Year Old)

#### 1 Ask “Are you choking?”

If they nod or cannot speak, proceed quickly.

#### 2 Encourage them to cough if they can.

If the cough is weak or silent, continue to step 3.

#### 3 Give up to 5 back blows.

- Stand slightly behind and to the side of the person.
- Support their chest with one hand.
- Lean them forward so the object can come out easily.
- With the heel of your other hand, give **up to five firm blows** between the shoulder blades.

After each blow, check if the object comes out.

#### 4 If the blockage remains, give up to 5 abdominal thrusts.

- Stand behind the person and wrap your arms around their waist.
- Make a fist and place it just above their navel.
- Grasp your fist with your other hand and pull sharply inwards and upwards.
- Repeat up to five times.

#### 5 Alternate between 5 back blows and 5 abdominal thrusts until the object is dislodged or help arrives.

**If the person becomes unresponsive:**

- Call **911 immediately**.



Give 5 Back Blows



Give 5 Abdominal Thrusts



Repeat Once Again

- Begin **CPR** (CardioPulmonary Resuscitation) if you are trained, starting with chest compressions.
- Continue until emergency help arrives.

## What To Do for Babies (Under 1 Year Old)

- 1** Sit down and hold the baby face down along your forearm, supporting the head and neck.
- 2** Give up to 5 back blows between the shoulder blades with the heel of your hand.
- 3** If the object doesn't come out, turn the baby over (face up), resting them on your thigh.
- 4** Give up to 5 chest thrusts using two fingers in the middle of the chest (just below the nipple line).
- 5** Repeat **5 back blows and 5 chest thrusts** until the object comes out or emergency help arrives.

**Call 911 immediately if the baby becomes unresponsive.**

Begin CPR if trained.

## After the Choking Episode

Even if the person seems fine afterwards, seek medical attention, especially if:

- they experienced severe coughing or difficulty breathing
- abdominal thrusts were used (to check for internal injury), or
- the person is a baby, child, or older adult.

## How to Help Prevent Choking

- Cut food into small pieces and chew slowly.
- Avoid talking or laughing while eating.
- Keep small objects, toys, and coins away from children.
- Supervise young children during meals.
- Avoid alcohol or sedatives when eating if they make you drowsy.
- Learn first aid — knowing what to do can save a life.

## FAQs

These are some common questions about Choking Emergencies.

**Q: Should I try to pull the object out of the throat?**

**A:** No — do not put your fingers into someone's mouth unless you can clearly see and easily remove the object. This may push it deeper.

**Q: What if I'm alone and choking?**

**A:** Call 911 if possible, then lean over the back of a chair or firm surface and press your upper abdomen firmly against it to perform self-abdominal thrusts.

**Q: Is it safe to hit someone on the back if they're coughing?**

**A:** Only give back blows if they cannot cough, speak, or breathe. If they're coughing effectively, encourage them to keep trying.