

SAFETY MEMO

Did you know?

April 10, 2023 – First Aid for Choking in a Conscious Person

This is a 2-part series on providing first aid to someone who is choking. For immediate assistance when you see someone choking, call 911.

Signs of Choking

Choking happens when the airway is blocked by a foreign object. If untreated, a person will lose consciousness and experience cardiac arrest.

A person who can speak, cough, or cry forcefully has adequate air, and may be able to clear their airway themselves.

If the airway is not completely blocked, simply stay with the person, and attempt to keep them calm. Only intervene when the person's airway is completely blocked. Recognize the signs of choking, which can include¹:

- Facial expression — panicked, confused, surprised
- Hands over their throat
- Weak cough
- Not able to speak, cough, or cry
- High-pitch squeak
- Skin may be red or pale blue
- Person may leave public settings to prevent being embarrassed.

Helping Someone Who is Choking

After assessing the scene, ask if the person is choking, and obtain consent to assist.

- Call 911.
- If available, get CPR/AED equipment in case they become unresponsive.
- If there are other people, assign someone these tasks. It is important to assign each task to a specific person, even if you do not know their name.
 - Use similar phrases or words to get someone's attention: "Hey, green shirt, call 911 someone is choking."

Provide care to the adult or child (figure 1) by giving 5 back blows followed by 5 abdominal thrusts and repeat.

When the person is too large to reach around their abdomen, pregnant, or in a wheelchair (figure 2), or an infant (figure 3), give 5 back blows followed by 5 chest thrusts, instead of abdominal thrusts.



Figure 1: Adult/Child Back Blows & Abdominal Thrusts²



Figure 2: Large or pregnant Adult chest thrusts



Figure 3: Infant Back Blows & Chest Thrusts³

Additional information on how to administer first aid to someone who is choking will be provided in next week's memo.

¹ St. John Ambulance. (January 2019). First Aid reference guide, 4th edition. Retrieved from https://www.sja.ca/sites/default/files/2021-05/First%20aid%20reference%20guide_V4.1_Public.pdf

² Mayo Clinic. (Oct 11, 2022). Choking: First Aid. Retrieved from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/first-aid/first-aid-choking/basics/art-20056637>
³ Fairview. (2022). Choking First Aid (Infant, up to age 1 year). Retrieved from <https://www.fairview.org/patient-education/511205EN>