

What to do if your child chokes

If a choking child is or becomes **UNCONSCIOUS** put them on a firm, flat surface and shout for help. Call 999 and put your phone on speakerphone so your hands are free. Do not leave the child. Open the child's mouth and if you can see the object, remove it. Do not put fingers into the mouth to feel for the object. Start CPR.

Coughing

1. Encourage them to cough to try to clear the blockage. Do not leave them.
2. If the airway is only partially blocked, the child will usually be able to speak, cry, cough or breathe. You should therefore try to remove the object if you can see it. Do not put your fingers in their mouth if you can't see the object, as there is a risk that you will push it further down.
3. If they are conscious and coughing isn't working, use back blows.

Back blows

1. For children under one year or a small child, lay them face down on your forearm or thigh, with their head low supporting the back and head. Give up to 5 back blows in the middle of the back with the heel of your hand. (Figure 1)
2. For children over one year support your child in a forward leaning position and give 5 back blows from behind. (Figure 2)
3. Check the child's mouth and remove the object.
4. If they are still conscious and back blows haven't been effective, use chest/ abdominal thrusts.

Figure 1



Figure 2



Chest/abdominal thrusts

1. Chest thrusts should be used for children under 1 year. Lay your child face up along the length of your thighs. Find the breastbone and place 2 fingers in the middle. Give 5 sharp chest thrusts (pushes), compressing the chest by about a third. (Figure 3)
2. Use abdominal thrusts for children over 1 year. Stand or kneel behind your child. Place your arms under the child's arms and around their upper abdomen. Clench your fist and place it between the navel and ribs. Grasp this hand with your other hand and pull sharply inwards and upwards. Repeat up to 5 times. (Figure 4)
3. Check the child's mouth and remove the object.

Figure 3



Figure 4



Next steps

1. If the object has not dislodged after trying back blows and chest/ abdominal thrusts, get help immediately.
2. Call 999 and ask for an ambulance. Tell the operator the child is choking.
3. Continue with the cycle of 5 back blows and 5 chest/abdominal thrusts until help arrives.

If the child has a persistent cough after choking or you think something is still stuck in their throat get urgent medical help at an accident and emergency department, NHS walk-in centre or from a GP.

For further information on what to do when a child chokes see:

- NHS website www.nhs.uk
- First Aid for Life website www.firstaidforlife.org.uk/baby-choking/ or www.onlinefirstaid.com/child-choking-2/
- St John's Ambulance website www.sja.org.uk

RoSPA's website www.rospa.com also contains more details on choking and other types of dangers in the home.

www.rospa.com

ROSPA

accidents don't have to happen

Choking Dangers to Children



RCPCH
Royal College of
Paediatrics and Child Health
Leading the way in Children's Health



Belfast Health and
Social Care Trust



The Royal Society for the Prevention Of Accidents

RoSPA has teamed up with the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and other organisations involved in Home Accident Prevention (HAP) in Northern Ireland to raise awareness with parents, carers, grandparents and health professionals on the dangers of choking.

Children can swallow, inhale, or choke on some types of food and objects like small toys. In addition, families with young children are reminded of the potential dangers of button cell batteries and nappy sacks.

Be aware

Food

Food like hot dogs, sausages, cherry tomatoes, grapes and other soft fruit can choke a child.

- Cut up food to a size that children can chew and eat safely e.g. cut sausages lengthways into small pieces and cherry/plum tomatoes, grapes, blackberries and other soft fruits into quarters.
- Sit children down to eat. They are more likely to choke when lying down, walking or running around.
- Do not leave your child alone at meal or snack times. Always supervise babies and young children.



Small objects

Small objects such as bits of toys, coins, jewellery and hair accessories can cause choking in children. Safety checks have found that 1 in 10 homes did not store small objects out of reach of children.

- Keep small objects out of little hands. Keep any small items out of sight and reach of children.
- Make sure your child plays only with toys appropriate for their age and stage of development to reduce the risk of choking. Be aware that older children may share unsuitable objects with younger brothers and sisters.
- Throw away broken toys.
- Never place hair bands, clips or hair ties on your baby.
- Do not put jewellery of any kind on a child under three years of age.



Nappy sacks

Nappy sacks differ from plastic bags as they are light and flimsy and are small enough to fit in little mouths or over faces. Babies can choke or suffocate on a nappy sack as they naturally grasp anything and put it in their mouths but they find it difficult to let go.

- Keep nappy sacks away from babies and young children.
- Do not place nappy sacks in or near a baby's cot, pram or buggy.



Button/coin cell batteries

Gadgets containing button/coin cell batteries are becoming more common, and increased numbers are introduced into homes in a variety of electronic products, toys and musical greeting cards. Due to their size, children can easily choke on them. Furthermore, if undetected, the batteries can do serious damage as they can burn through the throat or stomach and can cause further damage to other internal organs. **Go to hospital immediately if you think your child has swallowed a button battery.**

- It is a legal requirement for toys to have lockable battery compartments. This should mean that they are safe for children to use as the batteries are locked away but always check to make sure.
- It is unusual for other products using button/coin cell batteries to have lockable compartments. RoSPA advises that children should not be allowed to have access to these products.
- Be extra vigilant with items including remote controls, musical greeting cards and flameless candles, as they do not have lockable compartments. It is advisable that young children should not be allowed to have access to these products.
- Ensure that spare batteries are locked away, and used batteries are disposed of correctly.