

Choking in Adults

Basic advice for first aid in the workplace

Training & Education

The information below contains basic advice and should not be used as a substitute for effective training

Choking can happen when a foreign object becomes stuck in the throat causing muscular spasms. The casualty may be able to clear the airway if the blockage is mild, however if the blockage is severe the casualty will be unable to speak, cough or breathe and will become unresponsive.

Mild Choking

Mild choking is when the airway is partially blocked. The casualty will usually be able to speak, cry, cough or breathe and so should be able to clear the blockage themselves.

- Encourage them to cough
- Ask the casualty to spit out the object
- Do not put your fingers in their mouth to try and clear the blockage as they may accidentally bite

If coughing hasn't unblocked the object, start back blows (see severe choking, below)

Severe Choking

When the casualty has severe choking they will not be able to speak, cry, cough or breathe and will eventually become unconscious. You can help by giving 5 back blows, if the blockage is still obstructing the airway, you can give 5 abdominal thrusts.

If the casualty's airway is still blocked call 999 for an ambulance, continue to give back blows and abdominal thrusts until the blockage is cleared or help arrives.

1 5 x Back Blows



Check to see if the blockage has cleared

2 5 x Abdominal Thrusts



- Stand behind the casualty
- With one hand support the chest and lean them forwards
- Use the heel of your hand to give 5 blows between the shoulder blades

- Stand behind the casualty
- Place your arms around their waist and bend them forwards
- Clench one hand into a fist and place above their belly button, place the other hand over the first and pull sharply inwards and upwards

* Adapted from NHS choices What should I do if someone is choking www.nhs.uk and First Aid Manual, revised 10th edition