

# What to do if your child chokes

## Recognising choking

If you suspect a child has a foreign body or airway obstruction, **shout for help** and ask the child, “*Are you choking?*”

- If a child has a **partial obstruction**, they may still be able to speak, cry, cough, or breathe. So, encourage them to continue coughing. If the child is unable to breathe, speak, cough, or make a noise, they may have a **complete obstruction**. Immediate action is required.
- **Initial actions**

## If the child can cough, then encourage coughing

- Support the child and encourage them to cough to clear the blockage.
- Only remove the object if you can clearly see it. **Do not** blindly finger sweep their mouth as you can make things worse.
- If they are conscious and coughing is not working, follow the below steps:

## Children over 1 year

- Position the child so that they are leaning forward, supporting their upper body with one hand. (Figure 2)
- Deliver **up to five firm back blows** between the shoulder blades using the heel of your hand.
- After each blow, check to see if the obstruction has cleared.
- If the obstruction remains, call for an ambulance. Put your phone on speaker.

If they are still conscious and back blows have not been effective, proceed to abdominal thrusts.

## Babies under 1 year

- Lay the baby face down on your forearm or across your lap, supporting their head and jaw.
- Deliver up to five back blows between the shoulder blades using the heel of your other hand, check after each back blow to see if the obstruction has cleared. (Figure 1)
- **If unsuccessful, call for an ambulance. Put your phone on speaker.**

## Abdominal thrusts

- Stand or kneel behind the child. (Figure 4)
- Place your arms under their arms and around the upper abdomen.
- Make a fist and position it between the navel and the ribcage.
- Grasp your fist with the other hand and pull sharply inwards and upwards **up to five times**.
- Check their mouth after every thrust to see if the obstruction has cleared

## Chest thrusts

**Important: Never perform abdominal thrusts on a baby under 1 year.**

- Lay the baby on their back. (Figure 3)
- Place your two thumbs on the centre of the baby's chest and encircle the baby's rib cage with your hands. Use an upward thrust motion to compress their lower chest with your two thumbs. You are attempting to push down to force the obstruction upwards and out.
- Deliver **up to five chest thrusts**, compressing the chest about one third of its depth.
- Check after each chest thrust to see if the obstruction has cleared.



Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Images kindly provided by Emma Hammett BEM RGN  
FirstAidforLife.org.uk

## Next steps

- If the blockage does not clear after back blows and thrusts, **seek emergency help immediately** if you have not already done so.
- Call **999 or 112**, state that a child is choking, and continue alternating **five back blows and five chest/abdominal thrusts** until help arrives.
- Any child who has received abdominal thrusts or chest thrusts should be assessed in a hospital.
- Seek urgent medical advice if a persistent cough remains or you suspect an object is still lodged.

## If the child becomes unconscious

- Lay them on a firm, flat surface and call for help.
- Dial **999 / 112**, using speakerphone if possible.
- Begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

## Further guidance

- NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/baby-first-aid-and-safety/first-aid/how-to-stop-a-child-from-choking/>
- First Aid for Life: <https://www.firstaidforlife.org.uk/baby-choking>
- St John Ambulance: <https://www.sja.org.uk/first-aid-advice/child-choking>
- RoSPA: <https://www.rospace.com/health-and-safety-resources/keeping-kids-safe-hub/choking>

First Aid for Life and St. John Ambulance have produced videos on their website to show what to do if a child or baby is choking.



accidents don't have to happen

# Choking Dangers to Children



Belfast Health and Social Care Trust



The Royal Society for the Prevention Of Accidents

[www.rospace.com](http://www.rospace.com)

**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.