

Best practice guidance: managing choking episodes in babies and children

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This guidance includes:

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Who this guidance is for

This guidance has been developed to increase awareness in the management of an episode of choking for:

- Care inspectorate staff whilst carrying out regulatory (inspection, registration or complaint) activity.
- Service providers who are looking after babies and children.
- Anyone with an interest in this topic.

Which services this may involve

This guidance is relevant to all service types caring for babies and children. For example, child minders, nurseries, early years services, crèche, babysitting services and care homes for children.

An episode of choking can happen anywhere and at any time. This guidance cannot cover all situations. Knowledge of first aid is important.

We have used numbers in this guidance to refer to the sources of advice and guidance we have used:

1. Resuscitation Council (UK) Resuscitation Guidelines
2. Kindleskyes, 2005, Primary Health Care, October 2007
3. Child accident prevention trust <http://www.capt.org.uk/>
4. ENT.UK Choking – hazards in the home and how to avoid them
5. NHS Scotland Ready steady baby (2011), Safety and your growing baby <http://www.readysteadybaby.org.uk/growing-together/looking-after-your-growing-baby/safety-and-your-growing-baby.aspx>
6. NHS Health Scotland (reprinted 2013) Fun First Foods, An easy guide introducing solid foods Scottish Government

<http://www.healthscotland.com/uploads/documents/19260-FunFirstFoods.pdf>

7. NHS Health Scotland Ready Steady Toddler (2013) <http://www.readysteadytoddler.org.uk/>
8. The Good Egg Guide to In-home Child Safety, The Good Egg Guide to keeping your child safe at home, Dynamic Initiatives (2010) www.inhomechildsafety.co.uk
<http://www.goodegghomesafety.com/>
9. Health and Safety at Work, 2008 HSE

Definitions from Resuscitation Council (UK)

- A newborn is a child just after birth
- A neonate is a child in the first 28 days of life
- An infant is a child under 1 year
- A child is between 1 year and puberty¹

Definition of Choking

Choking has been defined as “A foreign object that is stuck in the pharynx (back of the throat) or trachea (windpipe) that causes a blockage of or muscular spasm in the airway. If there is mild airway obstruction, the casualty/child should be able to clear it, but if it is complete he or she will be unable to speak, cough or breathe. Unless there is intervention at this point the casualty will become unconscious and could die. The treatment of the choking differs depending on the age of the casualty”²

When a baby or child chokes it is an emergency medical situation.

Call 999 immediately when handling a choking incident – paramedics will determine whether the small foreign object has cleared or not on their arrival

The child accident prevention trust (UK) states that each day around forty under-5s are rushed to hospital after choking on something, or swallowing something dangerous. Food is the most likely cause, but small objects and toys can also be risky for young children³.

The Resuscitation Council UK (2012) also describes how the majority of choking events in children occur during play or whilst eating, when a carer is usually present. Events are therefore frequently witnessed, and interventions are usually started when the child is conscious.

Choking is characterised by the sudden onset of respiratory distress associated with coughing or gagging, or stridor (loud, harsh, high pitched respiratory sound). Similar signs and symptoms may also be associated with other causes of airway obstruction, such as laryngitis, or epiglottitis, which require different management.

Suspect choking caused by a foreign body if:

- the onset is very sudden
- there are no other signs of illness
- there are clues to alert the rescuer, e.g. history of eating or playing with small items immediately prior to the onset of symptoms³.

Sometimes choking can be silent with no sound to warn you something is wrong¹.

Relieving choking

- Safety comes first. Get help. Dial 999..
- Assess the situation if the child is coughing effectively, then no external manoeuvre is necessary
- Encourage the child to cough, and monitor continuously
- If the child's coughing is, or becomes, ineffective, **shout for help to contact emergency services immediately** and determine the child's conscious level
- Guidance on choking by the Resuscitation Council (UK) and how to relieve it is available at Chapter 9 - Paediatric Basic Life Support - Choking guidance page 100. The new version of the Resuscitation Council Guidance has been accredited by NICE and is available online at:
www.resus.org.uk/pages/pbls.pdf

The Resuscitation Council (UK) has produced paediatric choking treatment information and posters¹

Food Safety

A child dies in the United Kingdom every month from choking, and hundreds more require hospital treatment. It can happen quickly, and it can happen to anyone. Babies and toddlers are most at risk because they examine things around them by putting them in their mouths⁴.

For babies being weaned, to reduce the risk of choking on fruit and vegetables:

- remove any stones or pips before serving
- halve or chop small fruit, nuts and vegetables like cherry tomatoes and grapes
- cut large fruits into slices rather than chunks⁵.

Whole peanuts should be avoided until five years of age as there is a risk of choking (NHS Health Scotland, Fun First Foods (2013)⁶. (You can get advice on peanut allergy in Fun First Foods.)

This summary is given on the back page of Fun First Foods:

“How to prevent your baby from choking:

- Always stay with your baby when she is eating
- Cook hard or stringy vegetables such as green beans and carrots until they are quite soft for use as finger foods, rather than offering them raw
- Encourage your baby to chew but avoid giving small items such as peas, whole grapes, or whole cherry tomatoes
- Stop your baby from putting too much food in her mouth in case she chokes
- Make sure her mouth is empty before the next mouthful of food. It is important to go at your baby's pace
- Let your baby feed herself so she is in control and the food does not go too far back in her mouth
- Ask your health visitor / public health nurse for advice on how to deal with choking. If your child has special needs and you need advice, ask to speak to a speech and language therapist.”⁶

Reduce the risk of your child choking

The following advice is given in Ready Steady Toddler about fruit and vegetables (January 2013) at Good eating habits.

- “Remove any stones or pips before serving.
- Halve or chop small fruits and vegetables like cherry tomatoes and grapes.
- Cut large fruits into slices rather than chunks.”⁷

Watch out for small round food items

Children can choke on these things – avoid them under age 4 years.

- Peanuts
- Whole grapes
- Boiled sweets
- Hot dogs
- Chocolate eggs with small toys inside⁴
- Raw carrots
- Popcorn
- Nuts (whole peanuts should be avoided until the age of 5)⁶

Toy safety

Keep small objects out of reach. Remember - **all** small objects could be a potential hazard and block a child’s airway.

For example:

- coins, pins, screws, beads
- button batteries
- balls smaller than 1¾ inches (4.45cm)
- deflated balloons or pieces of a burst balloon⁴
- plastic bags (to prevent inhalation)
- glitter (to prevent inhalation) – if used by child ensure supervision
- toys should be age appropriate.

Choose toys from a well known manufacturer

- Toys which are a choking hazard because of small parts will be marked with a symbol (face scored through with ‘0-3’ in writing) and make use of the manufacturer’s guide, for example “toys not suitable for under 36 months”.
- Never let children run with objects in their mouth or while they are eating.⁴
- Take advice when buying baby toys to make sure they are suitable for your baby’s age. Don’t rely on a CE mark alone as a guarantee of safety. A CE mark on a product is simply a declaration by the manufacturer that the product meets all the requirements of European law and is safe to use. For added reassurance look for third party independent safety certification. Check that toys have no broken bits, sharp edges or loose parts.
- Never give a young baby a toy with long hair or fur as these can cause choking – and never string a line of toys across a pram or cot as the string could break or come loose and get wrapped around your baby’s neck
- To be on the safe side, remove all cot toys – especially mobiles which could now be in your baby’s reach.⁸

Baby listening monitor and safety

- You can't be with your baby at all times, so fitting one of these can give you valuable peace of mind. But you should never rely on it totally as it could break down without you knowing it. **Also, many serious accidents such as choking happen silently.** There's simply no substitute for checking on your baby regularly, whether you have a monitor or not.⁸

When baby starts to crawl and is toddling:

- Young children at this stage explore their new world by putting anything they pick up straight into their mouth. So when they start to shuffle and crawl, make sure there are no small or sharp objects on the floor that could choke or cut your baby – buttons or safety pins, for example. Vacuum the floor regularly. This should pick up most of these objects, or at least show you where they are. If you have older children in the house, also make sure that their toys are never left lying around for your baby to chew and choke on.⁸

Looped cord blinds and safety

Ready Steady Baby give this advice on looped cord blinds (2011)

- To reduce the risk posed by looped blind cords they should be kept out of the reach of children. If you can, buy blinds that do not have a cord, particularly in your child's bedroom, but where they do exist; do not place a child's cot, bed, playpen or highchair near a window. Tie up the cords or use one of the many cleats, cord tidies, clips or ties that are available.⁵

Baby clothing and safety

- To reduce the risk of suffocation or choking, choose plain, simple clothes for your baby to sleep in and avoid ribbons, braces or large-weave cardigans as these can get hooked up or twisted around your baby's neck.
- Also, check for loose buttons as these can easily be swallowed.⁸

Health and Safety at Work

Under the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981, workplaces should have first aid provision. The minimum requirement for any workplace is that when people are at work (including nightshifts), there should be at least one appointed person who will take charge in an emergency situation. This includes being responsible for calling an ambulance and looking after the first aid equipment for example restocking the first aid box.

An appointed person should be available at all times while people are working on site; this may mean appointing more than one. It is recommended that an appointed person should have received emergency first aid training. Although the Health and Safety Regulations only refer to facilities for employees, it is recommended that you extend these to cover service users and visitors.⁹

This guidance only supplements first aid training and does not replace it. It is good practice for staff to receive paediatric first aid training on a regular basis.

Guidance for Care Inspectorate staff

- Services must have risk assessments in place.
- Services must have a policy in place for emergency situations, such as, first aid including choking, strangulation and resuscitation.
- Services should have health and safety procedures and monitoring in place to minimise the risks to babies and children and to maximise safety.
- Services should have the necessary amount of first aiders.
- Staff in services should know what to do in an emergency.
- If choking incidents happen, the service must keep a record and document the date, time and place of the incident, all the care that was given and what happened to the baby/child immediately afterwards.⁸
- If an incident resulted in a hospital admission, or the child was seriously injured, the service should notify the Care Inspectorate.
- Staff in services should know about Care Inspectorate notifications.
- The service should have a list of emergency services and staff in services should know who to contact in an emergency.
- The list of emergency contacts should be visible and available to all staff in services.
- Care Inspectorate staff should sample education and training records and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) training to check if first aid training has been given and kept up to date.
- Staffing levels should be appropriate for the number of babies and children being cared for in services.
- Staff in services should have access to a computer, tablet or similar IT equipment to access and learn about first aid.
- The service should have posters on display informing staff what to do if an emergency happens involving choking in a baby or child.
- Services should provide education and support to the young children using its service on how to avoid choking.
- Services should have access to up to date best practice guidance, for example Fun first foods, Ready steady baby.

The law: related Scottish Statutory Instruments

The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011

The Scottish Statutory Instruments Requirements for Care Services: SSI 2011 No.210 (the regulations) outlines the requirements that the Care Inspectorate would inspect against; relating to emergency situations.

Welfare of users

- A provider must make proper provision for the health, welfare and **safety** of service users..

Personal plans

- Review the personal plan when there is a **significant change in a service user's health, welfare or safety needs.**

Fitness of employees

- A provider must not employ any person in the provision of a care service unless that person is fit to be so employed in the provision of a care service.
- The following persons are unfit to be employed in the provision of a care service: a person who does not have the **qualifications, skills and experience** necessary for that the person is to perform.

Staffing

- A provider must, having regard to the size and nature of the care service, the statement of aims and objectives and the number and needs of service users.
- Ensure that at all times suitably qualified and competent persons are working in the care service **in such numbers as are appropriate for the health, welfare and safety of service users**; and ensure that persons employed in the provision of the care service receive: **training appropriate to the work they are to perform**; and suitable assistance, including time off work, for the purposes of obtaining further qualifications appropriate to such work.

Related National Care Standards for care homes for children and young people

Feeling safe and secure - Standard 6

- You feel safe and secure in all aspects of your stay in the care home. At any time, there are enough staff available to help you when needed.
- You know that fire and safety procedures are in place, meet regulations and guidelines on best practice, and are followed. **Risk assessments are regularly updated.**
- You know what will happen if there is a fire **or any other emergency, and what you should do.**
- You know that accidents **or other incidents are recorded and investigated.** **Your family is informed of any serious incident.**

Management and staffing - Standard 7

- You experience good quality care and support. This is provided by managers and staff whose professional training and expertise allows them to meet your needs. Your care is in line with the law and best-practice guidelines.

- You can be confident that effective recording and information systems are in place. **All significant incidents are recorded.**
- You know that the care home staff have the knowledge and skills necessary to undertake their roles and tasks and to meet your needs. **You know that the service has a staff development strategy and an effective yearly training plan for all its staff.** For staff caring for you directly, this focuses on them achieving the qualifications required for registration with the SSSC.”

Eating well - Standard 10

- If you need any help to eat your food (for example, **a liquidised diet, adapted cutlery or crockery, or help from a staff member**) staff will arrange this for you.
- **Staff will regularly review anything that may affect your ability to eat or drink**, such as your dental health. They will arrange for you to advice if you need it.

Related National Care Standards for early education and childcare up to the age of 16

Health and wellbeing - Standard 3

- Children and young people have **opportunities to learn** about healthy lifestyles and relationships, hygiene, **diet and personal safety.**
- Children and young people have access to a well-balanced and healthy diet (where food is provided) which takes account of ethnic, cultural and dietary requirements, including food allergies. **Staff make sure that help with feeding is given in a way that best meets the needs of the child or young person.**
- You can be confident that **the service has a clear policy on how to deal with emergencies and staff are well trained in emergency procedures.**

Confidence in staff – Standard 12

- You can be confident that the service:
 - complies with the input standards on adult:child ratios and staff qualifications detailed at Annex A
 - applies procedures to select staff with a range of qualifications, skills and experience relevant to the aims of the service
 - provides staffing levels which are sufficient to provide for the needs of children and young people and allow for continuity of care**
 - uses staff in ways that make good sense of their expertise
 - has an effective system for identifying and monitoring staff development needs; training is carefully planned and evaluated in line with national and local guidelines.**

Well managed service – Standard 14

- You can be confident that the records, plans and policies are properly made and kept in accordance with national and local guidance. These should include:
 - details of the aims and objectives of the service
 - admission criteria and process

- charges
- **accident and incident reports**
- injury insurance
- **contact details**
- confidentiality
- **emergency procedures**
- child protection policies
- and whistle blowing.

Childcare agencies

Quality - Standard 4

- You know that the childcare agency will:
 - provide a child carer who will interact effectively and enthusiastically with your child or children and who will make use of the resources available to allow the child or children to experience and choose from a range of activities (these activities **will take account of the individual needs of the child or children**, including their cultural, language and communication, and religious needs, **and safety issues** notify you without delay **in the event of any mishap during the childcare arrangements or if the child carer has any concern for the welfare of your child.**

Management and staffing arrangements - Standard 4

- You can be confident that the childcare agency keeps up-to-date records of the continuing learning and development undertaken by each child carer. It has policies, procedures and systems in place to assess and monitor the child carer's performance and development needs.

Foster care and family placement service

Management and staffing – Standard 13

- You can be confident that **all staff use methods that reflect up-to-date knowledge and best- practice guidance**, and that the management are continuously striving to improve practice.
- You can be confident that the agency has effective recording and information systems. **All significant contacts and incidents are recorded.**

Web links

The British Red Cross

www.redcross.org.uk

Gives information on choking with links to video, audio information, and animation along with frequently asked questions and a fact sheet. The section 'Everyday first aid' provides on line training and an app. to scan and download.

St Johns ambulance

www.sja.org.uk

St Andrews First Aid – Scottish First Aid Organisation

www.firstaid.org.uk

Includes an easy-to-view podcast for emergency situations.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

www.rosipa.com

Includes information on choking hazards and how to avoid them

NHS Choices - web information on choking

www.nhs.uk

www.nhsinform.co.uk

Resuscitation council (UK)

www.resus.org.uk

NHS Health Scotland

Fun first foods (reprinted 2013)

www.healthscotland.com/uploads/documents/303-FunFirstFoods.pdf

Gives advice on reducing the risk of choking.

British Standards Institution

www.bsi-global.com

For advice on safety standards on baby equipment.

Further reading

The Caroline Walker Trust - Eating well for under 5s in childcare

www.cwt.org.uk/pdfs/Under5s.pdf

Nutritional Guidance for Early Years – food choices for children 1-5 years in early education and childcare settings, Scottish Government (2006).

Information on children with special needs can be found in section 3.7.

www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/01/18153659/4

The Health and Safety Executive (Scotland) HSE provides information on

books www.hse.gov.uk/scotland/index.htm

Health and social care page www.hse.gov.uk/healthservices/index.htm

Fun First Foods (given out by health visitors) – NHS Health Scotland

www.healthscotland.com/documents/303.aspx

Ready Steady Baby (given out by maternity services) book, website and

app. www.readysteadybaby.org.uk/growing-together/looking-after-your-growing-baby/weaning-your-baby/index.aspx

Ready Steady Toddler (given out by nursery schools) book and website

www.readysteadytoddler.org.uk/everyday-routines/food-and-diet/index.aspx

Good Egg Guide to Child Safety (given out by maternity services)

www.pkc.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=15084&p=0

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অনুরূপে প্রসঙ্গক্রমে এই প্রকাশনাটি অন্য ফরম্যাট এবং অন্যান্য ভাষায় পাওয়া যায়।

Tha am foillseachadh seo ri fhaighinn ann an cruthannan is cànan eile ma nithear iarrtas.

অনুরোধসাপেক্ষে এই প্রকাশনাটি অন্য ফরম্যাট এবং অন্যান্য ভাষায় পাওয়া যায়।

یہ اشاعت گزارش پر دیگر شکلوں اور دیگر زبانوں میں دستیاب ہے۔

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