



Keeping children safe at home: Choking, strangulation and suffocation

Protect your child from choking, strangulation and suffocation

Although choking, strangulation and suffocation occur less often than other types of injuries, they are very serious and often result in death. Life-long disabilities can also occur when choking, strangulation or suffocation result in too little oxygen to a child's brain.

Choking happens when a child's airway is blocked by an item such as food, sweets, nuts, pills, small toys and latex balloons.

Suffocation happens when a child cannot get enough oxygen because something outside their body blocks the flow of air. This can be caused by plastic bags or getting trapped in a sealed container such as a toy chest.

Strangulation happens when a child cannot get oxygen because his or her throat is squeezed tightly. This can be caused by items like clothing drawstrings, crib bars, window blinds and drapery cords.

The good news is that these injuries are preventable.

Keeping Your Child Safe

- Pay attention to warning labels on toys and other products that are likely to be accessed by children. Follow age recommendations on toy packaging. Children's balls should be larger than a golf ball.
- Ensure all your child's toys have a CE marking.
- Keep small objects out of reach of young children as they can cause choking. Teach older children to keep toys with small parts away from their younger siblings.
- Discard all broken toys.
- Check floors and low places for small objects like buttons, beads, marbles, coins, pins and stones.
- Do not give children younger than four years of age food that they could choke on. Small, hard foods like nuts, popcorn and sweets can be particularly dangerous. Cut smooth, round foods like grapes and hot dogs lengthwise before serving them to children.

- Teach children to sit while eating. Children should never run or play while eating.
- Avoid giving your child food that has small objects inside, such as candies that come with small toys inside.
- Put your baby to sleep on its back.
- Keep your child's cot or bed free from soft things and toys, especially toys with strings or small pieces. Do not use canopies, curtains or mobiles over the bed.
- Keep animals, especially cats, out of children's bedrooms and use a net on a pram.
- Put all plastic wrappings or bags where children cannot reach them.
- Cut the pull cords on curtains and blinds and keep them out of reach of small children.
- Take hood and neck drawstrings off all children's clothing.
- Make sure children remove their bike helmets and necklaces before using playground equipment.
- Above all else, always watch children when they are eating or playing.
- For children with special needs, these safety tips may be even more important.

What to do in an emergency

- If you suspect choking, call for an ambulance immediately. If the child is unconscious and not breathing, call emergency services immediately.
- Do not try to remove the object in your child's throat; you could end up pushing it even further down.
- Hold a choking child over your knee or a chair with the child's head pointing downwards and then slap firmly between the shoulder blades.
- Take a basic first aid course for more information about how to deal with an emergency.

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