



Choking in Infants Under 1 Year

Overview

Choking occurs when an infant's airway is blocked by food, a toy, or another object, making it difficult or impossible to breathe. Without oxygen, brain damage can occur in as little as 4 minutes. Rapid first aid for choking can save an infant's life.

Causes

Choking in infants is most often caused by inhaling or swallowing small objects, such as:

- Buttons
- Coins
- Balloons
- Toy parts
- Watch batteries

Choking can result from:

- **Complete blockage:** A medical emergency.
 - **Partial blockage:** Can quickly become life-threatening if the infant cannot get enough air.
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Symptoms

Warning signs of choking include:

- Bluish skin color (cyanosis)
- Difficulty breathing (ribs and chest pull inward)
- Loss of consciousness (unresponsiveness) if blockage is not cleared
- Inability to cry or make much sound
- Weak, ineffective coughing
- Soft or high-pitched sounds while inhaling

First Aid for Choking

Do not perform these steps if the infant is coughing forcefully or has a strong cry. Strong coughs and cries can help push the object out.

Step 1: Back Blows

- Lay the infant face down along your forearm, using your thigh or lap for support.
- Hold the infant's chest in your hand and the jaw with your fingers.
- Point the infant's head downward, lower than the body.
- Give up to 5 quick, forceful blows between the infant's shoulder blades using the palm of your free hand.

Step 2: Chest Thrusts

- If the object does not come out after 5 back blows, turn the infant face-up, using your thigh or lap for support.
- Support the head.
- Place 2 fingers on the middle of the breastbone just below the nipples.
- Give up to 5 quick thrusts down, compressing the chest one third to one half the depth of the chest.

Step 3: Repeat

- Continue 5 back blows followed by 5 chest thrusts until the object is dislodged or the infant loses alertness (becomes unconscious).

If the Infant Loses Alertness

If the infant becomes unresponsive, stops breathing, or turns blue:

- Shout for help.
- Begin infant CPR.
- Call 911 or the local emergency number after 1 minute of CPR.
- If the object is visible in the mouth, try to remove it with your finger. Only attempt removal if the object can be seen.

Important Do Nots

- Do not perform choking first aid if the infant is coughing forcefully, has a strong cry, or is breathing enough. Be ready to act if symptoms worsen.
 - Do not try to grasp and pull out the object if the infant is alert (conscious).
 - Do not perform back blows and chest thrusts if the infant stops breathing for other reasons (such as asthma, infection, swelling, or a blow to the head). In these cases, give CPR.
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When to Contact a Medical Professional

- Tell someone to call 911 or the local emergency number while you begin first aid.
 - If alone, shout for help and begin first aid.
 - Always call a health care provider after a child has been choking, even if the object is removed and the infant seems fine.
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Prevention

- Cut large pieces of food into easily chewable sizes.
 - Do not give children under 3 years old balloons or toys with small parts that can break off.
 - Keep infants away from buttons, popcorn, coins, grapes, nuts, and other small items.
 - Watch infants and toddlers while they are eating. Do not allow a child to crawl around while eating.
 - Teach the earliest safety lesson: “No!”
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About Us

OneWomb is a digital health platform by Doctors Explain Digital Health Co. LTD, dedicated to improving maternal, newborn, and child health across Africa. OneWomb connects families and frontline workers with trusted tools, training, and telehealth support—anytime, anywhere.

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(This document is intended for educational purposes. For emergencies, always seek immediate medical assistance.)