

# Choking



## Signs, Symptoms & Treatment

Choking occurs when a foreign object, such as food or a small object, becomes lodged in the throat or windpipe, blocking the flow of air. Because choking cuts off oxygen to the brain, administer first aid as quickly as possible.

Objects can get partially caught in the airway, causing a “partial obstruction”. This is common when eating food – the food goes down “the wrong way” and the casualty begins to cough. If coughing is effective, encourage the person to cough. Do not use back blows/chest thrust unless they are unable to cough effectively. If they move the object by coughing, it could either be ejected from the airway (problem solved) or it could completely obstruct the airway and the person would be unable to cough.

The universal sign for choking would typically be hands clutched to the throat. If the person doesn’t give the signal, look for these indications:

- Inability to talk
- Difficulty breathing or noisy breathing
- Inability to cough effectively
- Skin, lips and nails turning blue or dusky
- Loss of consciousness

If the person is unable to cough effectively, give up to 5 forceful blows using the heel of your hand to hit between their shoulder blades. The force of the blow is relative to the size of the casualty.

If the back blows are ineffective, call 000 and give 5 chest thrusts by holding their back and short sharp compressions on their sternum (center of chest).

REPEAT the back blows and chest thrusts until:

- The object is cleared / the casualty is able to breath
- The patient becomes unconscious – begin CPR

For a small child or infant, it may be easier to sit in a chair and place them over your lap for the back blows:

## Button Batteries

A button battery is a small single cell flat battery that runs chemicals like lithium and silver oxide. Button batteries can vary in size, from 0.5cm to 2.5cm in width. They are used in common household items such as flameless candles, toys, games, cameras, key fobs, kids jewellery, torches, book lights, kitchen scales and musical greeting cards.

Swallowing any button battery, old or new, can cause life threatening injuries and even death, especially if it becomes stuck in the oesophagus (food pipe). Batteries which become stuck in the nose or ears can also cause local burns.

When swallowed, the left over electrical current in a button battery reacts with moisture to produce a strong alkali chemical. The chemical can cause serious internal burns and bleeding. The batteries can also leak chemicals which can cause serious burns. The coin shaped batteries are easily caught in the oesophagus, and when stuck can start to cause damage very quickly (within 2 hours).

### First aid for swallowed button batteries

- If your child is having any difficulty breathing, call 000 immediately
- Call the Poisons Information Centre 13 11 26.
- Take your child immediately to the nearest Emergency Department for assessment and treatment
- Do not try to make your child vomit
- Do not let your child eat or drink while awaiting medical advice.

**If you know or just suspect that your child has swallowed a button battery you must act immediately.**

[www.poisonsinfo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.poisonsinfo.nsw.gov.au)