

Safety and Emergency Care

Choking

Many people die each year by choking. Choking usually happens when food or another object gets stuck in the throat. Residents are at risk of choking when:

- Their bites of food are too large or are poorly chewed.
- They talk or laugh too much while eating.
- Their dentures do not fit well.
- They have a chronic illness or stroke, which causes weakness and difficulty swallowing.

If the throat is completely blocked, this is called an airway obstruction. You must act quickly. You have only four to eight minutes to save the resident's life. A choking victim who is still conscious will usually grab or gesture at their throat (Figure 3-4). In some cases, the resident may already be unconscious when you find them.



Figure 3-4 People who are choking tend to clutch at their throat.

Signs of a complete airway obstruction include:

- Bluish skin, lips, and nails
- Difficult, noisy breathing or not breathing at all
- Inability to speak or cough with force

With a partial airway obstruction, the resident can speak, breathe, and cough but may have difficulty breathing and may not be getting enough oxygen.

If the resident cannot eject the object from their throat by forceful coughing, assistance is likely needed from an emergency medical team. The charge nurse may ask you to call 911. It is important that you are familiar with the emergency equipment used in your facility because you may also be asked to get items such as oxygen and suction equipment.

When a resident is choking, you should:

1. Ask “Are you choking?” The resident will not be able to answer if his or her airway is completely blocked.
2. Call for help.
3. Never leave the resident. This is a life-threatening situation.

4. Administer first aid for choking (Procedure 3-2). When performed properly, the **Heimlich maneuver** (Figure 3-5) will dislodge the object from the resident’s throat.



Figure 3-5 The Heimlich maneuver is used as part of first aid for choking victims.

PROCEDURE

3-2 First Aid for Choking

REMEMBER: BE AWARE

FOR A PERSON WHO IS SITTING OR STANDING:

- 1 Stand behind the resident.
- 2 Wrap your arms around the resident’s waist, and lean the resident slightly forward.
- 3 Make a fist with one hand and place it on the resident’s stomach below the rib cage and a little above the navel. Keep your thumb on their stomach, and place your other hand over your fist.

- 4 Sharply thrust your fist inward and upward. This causes a burst of air from the lungs that should dislodge the food or object.

- 5 Repeat the thrusts until the blockage is dislodged.

FOR A PERSON WHO HAS BECOME UNCONSCIOUS AFTER CHOKING:

- 1 If the resident is not already on the floor, gently lower them to the floor and call for help.
- 2 Once the resident is on the floor, position them on their back.

- 3 Kneel at the resident’s side.

- 4 CPR should be initiated based on the facility’s policy and patient directives.

- 5 Medical staff may ask you to monitor and assist with CPR, depending upon facility policy and your training.

REMEMBER: UNDERSTAND

DISCLAIMER: AHCA/NCAL has created this course to assist providers to recruit and train temporary staff during the national emergency caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Federal and/or state requirements may need to be waived to permit individuals under this training program in your location. Employers should check with their state survey agencies and their state occupational licensing agencies where applicable to ensure individuals trained under this program are permitted to assist with care in your location.