



Wellness Buddy Wednesday Tip

Choking: First Aid

Choking often results from a piece of food becoming lodged in the throat or windpipe, blocking the flow of air. Because choking cuts off oxygen to the brain, first aid should be administered quickly.



Everyone should learn to give and to recognize the universal distress signal for choking. The universal sign for choking is hands clutched to the throat. If a person doesn't give the signal other indications may be:

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

When someone is choking, the Red Cross recommends a *“five-and-five”* approach to delivering first aid:

- Deliver five back blows between the person's shoulder blades with the heel of your hand.
- Perform five abdominal thrusts (also known as the **Heimlich maneuver**).
- Alternate between five back blows and five abdominal thrusts until the blockage is dislodged.

If you're the only rescuer, perform back blows and abdominal thrusts before calling 911 (or your local emergency number) for help. If another person is available, have that person call for help while you perform first aid.



To perform abdominal thrusts (Heimlich maneuver) on someone else:

- Stand behind the person. Wrap your arms around the waist.
- Make a fist with one hand. Position it slightly above the person's navel.
- Grasp the fist with one hand. Press hard into the abdomen with a quick, upward thrust—as if trying to lift the person up.
- Perform a total of five abdominal thrusts, if needed. If the blockage still isn't dislodged, repeat the "five-and-five" cycle.

If you're alone and choking, you'll be unable to effectively deliver back blows to yourself. But, you can still deliver abdominal thrusts to dislodge the item.

To perform abdominal thrusts (Heimlich maneuver) on yourself:

- Place a fist slightly above your navel.
- Grasp your fist with the other hand and bend over a hard surface—a countertop or chair will do.
- Show your fist inward and upward.

Clearing the airway of a pregnant woman or obese person:

- Position your hands a little bit higher than with a normal Heimlich maneuver, at the base of the breastbone, just above the joining of the lowest ribs.
- Proceed as with the Heimlich maneuver, pressing hard into the chest, with a quick thrust.
- Repeat until the food or other blockage is dislodged or the person becomes unconscious.

While you must act quickly when someone is choking, you should avoid overreacting and trying to use these maneuvers when it is not necessary. If someone is choking but able to speak or cough effectively, do not interfere with their attempts to expel the foreign material.



Providing guidance and support to make the "healthy choice the easy choice!"

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