

# How to help if your baby is choking



## How to help if your baby is choking

One of the top fears among parents is the risk of choking and this is not without cause. Choking is incredibly common, however for the majority of babies, fast and instant first aid can ensure that they make a full recovery. This article on 'how to help if your baby is choking' will provide you with support, advice and tips to see you through this daunting process.

Whilst you shouldn't be alarmed, you should equip yourself with as much information as possible in order to reduce the chances of choking. You should also learn how to help if your baby does choke. Ensure you are able to recognise the signs of choking, which are different to the signs of gagging.

## Learning to swallow is a learning process

Whilst eating solids is a natural and instinctive behaviour for us as adults, just like learning how to talk, it is a process that babies learn gradually. Babies are learning to regulate the amount of food they can chew and swallow at a time.

Although disturbing gagging is actually a safety mechanism designed to prevent choking. It is a normal reflex as babies learn to eat solids and liquids. Signs of gagging include; watery eyes, tongue hanging out of the mouth and retching movements or even vomiting.

Gagging can be caused by too much food, a dislike for the food, or some babies even gag on their own fingers just to see how far they can put things in their mouths. Babies also gag on liquids as they learn the rhythm of sucking.

## Choking

Choking occurs when the airway becomes blocked. Rather than going down the oesophagus which is the food tube, it goes down the breathing tube. Usually when we eat or drink and swallow, the epiglottis covers the top of the trachea (wind

pipe) and stops food from entering it. Sometimes, particularly if talking, laughing or crying whilst eating, the flap of the epiglottis is unable to protect the trachea and this enables food to enter. The body's reflex if this happens is to cough in an effort to eject the food. However, if the airway becomes completely blocked the baby is unable to cough and they choke.

## Choking - prevention

- Ensure your baby is sitting up in their high chair and always supervise their meal times.
- Cut food into very small pieces. Be aware that children can put too much food into their mouth at any one time, even if it's cut up small.
- Puree or blend foods, especially at the beginning of the weaning process.
- Discourage older children from sharing food with babies.
- Cut small round foods (grapes, cherry tomatoes) into small pieces.
- Remove bones from meat or fish.
- Peel fruit, vegetables and sausages.
- Remove pips or stones from fruit.
- Avoid hard foods such as raw carrot, apple, whole nuts and peanuts.

Visit [\*\*the HSE website\*\*](#) for a comprehensive guideline on preparation of foods to avoid choking.

It is not just food that babies can choke on, they can also choke on small objects such as coins, buttons and small toys. Check under furniture and between cushions for small items that children could find and put in their mouths.

Toys are designed to be used by children within a certain age range. Age guidelines take into account the safety of a toy based on any possible choking hazard. Don't let young children play with toys designed for older children.

## Choking - the signs

If your baby is choking, you may notice that:

- They are unable to breathe, cry or cough
- They may have a red puffy face
- They are showing signs of distress

## How to help if your baby is choking

1. Stay as calm as you can as babies quickly pick up on panic and this can make things worse.
2. If they are able to cough, reposition them to see if they can clear it themselves.
  - If your baby is conscious but they are not coughing effectively, you will need to deliver first aid.
  - Call 999 or 112 immediately if your baby is choking, is not conscious or is unresponsive
3. Sit down. Lay the baby face downwards across your forearm on your knee, supporting under their head, jaw and neck. Their head should be lower than their body.
4. With your hand hit the baby up to 5 times firmly between their shoulder blades, this is often referred to as 'slap it out'.



5. Have a quick look in the baby's mouth and carefully remove anything obvious. Never blindly sweep inside the baby's mouth with your fingers as it can cause damage and push the obstruction further down.
6. If this does not work turn your baby over so they are laying face up on your thighs, head downwards. Make sure you support their head and neck. Place two fingers in the centre of their chest at the nipple line,

and give up to five, firm upward chest thrusts. This is often referred to as 'squeeze it out'.



7. If the baby is still choking, call 999/112 for emergency help, if you have not done so already. Then continue giving baby five back blows, alternated with five chest thrusts, until help arrives.
8. If the baby becomes unconscious start CPR immediately.
9. If during CPR you see the object, remove it with your fingers but do not put your fingers into your baby's mouth if you cannot see the object.
10. If the object does come out you should always seek medical help afterwards to check that there are no injuries as a result of the choking.

St Johns Ambulance provide a video showing this procedure which you can view by ***clicking here.***

## **About us**

Donegal Safety Services provide a number of first aid training courses which you can view ***here.***

If you have any questions at all regarding any of our courses we would be delighted to hear from you. You can contact us by visiting our contact us page or by emailing us directly on [info@donegalsafetyservices.ie](mailto:info@donegalsafetyservices.ie)

Donegal Safety Services provides this information for guidance and it is not in any way a substitute for medical advice. Donegal Safety Services is not responsible or

liable for any diagnosis made, or actions taken on this information.

Hope you enjoyed this article on how to help if your baby is choking.