

Choking Relief

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The Heimlich Maneuver, named after Dr. Henry Heimlich, a thoracic surgeon, recognized that numerous people were dying each year from choking. He envisioned using the compressed air in the lungs to expel blockage from the windpipe, and found that compressing the abdomen with upward thrusts would successfully clear blockage in the windpipe. This technique has saved millions of lives since its introduction in 1972. Dr. C. Everett Koop, during his days as Surgeon General made the following declaration:

“Millions of Americans have been taught to treat persons whose airways are obstructed by a foreign body by administering back blows, chest thrusts and abdominal thrusts. Now they must be advised that these methods are hazardous, even lethal. A back slap can drive a foreign object even deeper into the throat. Chest and abdominal thrust, because they refer to blows to unspecified locations on the body, have resulted in cracked ribs and damaged spleens and livers among other injuries. The best rescue technique in any choking situation is the Heimlich Maneuver. The Heimlich Maneuver is safe, effective and easily mastered by the average person. It can be performed on standing or seated victims and on persons who have fallen to the floor. It can be performed on children and even on oneself.”

How to do the Heimlich Maneuver to assist a choking victim, infant and yourself.

Know the signs of choking, stay calm and think first before you act. Perform this simple maneuver immediately. A choking person cannot speak or breathe, may clutch their throat and appear blue. Calmly reassure the victim that you are going to help them.

1. From behind, wrap your arms around the person's waist keeping your elbows extended out sideways.
2. Make a fist and place the thumb side of your fist against the victim's upper abdomen, below the ribcage and above the belly button.
3. Grasp your fist with your other hand and press into their upper abdomen with a quick upward thrust. Remember to keep your elbows out and confine the force of the upward thrust from your hands.
4. Repeat this procedure until the object is expelled.

If the person is unconscious or when you are unable to reach around the choking person, place the individual on his back on a solid surface. Facing the person, kneel astride the person's hips. With one of your hands on top of the other, place the heel of your bottom hand on the upper abdomen below the rib cage and above the belly button. Use your body weight to press into the person's upper abdomen with quick upward thrusts. Repeat this procedure until the object is expelled.

Incorrect instructions on choking children and infants under one year of age are still appearing in the media. Back slaps and back blows are not recommended for any choking person. This practice is likely to cause more harm by forcing the object deeper into the throat. The American Red Cross teaches the Heimlich Maneuver correctly for children and adults, however, their instructions for infants under the age of one call for back slaps and chest thrusts. Dr. Henry

Heimlich states that these instructions are “absolutely wrong.” The Heimlich Maneuver is effective because pressing the diaphragm upward provides an even compression of the lungs, which causes a flow of air. That air provides energy necessary to push the object out through the mouth. A leading cause of death in the home is choking. Most of these deaths occur among children under the age of four who either place objects in their mouths or are given food too large or hard for them to eat. Follow these steps to assist a choking infant:

Lay the child down, face up on a firm surface and kneel or stand at the child’s feet or hold the infant on your lap facing away from you. Place your middle and index fingers of both hands below his rib cage above his belly button. Press into the child’s upper abdomen with quick upward thrusts, remembering to not squeeze the ribcage. Be gentle while using enough force to produce the flow of air to dislodge the object. Repeat this procedure until the object is expelled.

If you are alone and choking, follow these familiar steps:

1. Make a fist and place the thumb side of your fist against your upper abdomen, below the ribcage and above your belly button.
2. Grasp your fist with your other hand and press into your upper abdomen with a quick upward thrust. If this procedure is difficult, lean over a fixed horizontal object, such as a table edge, chair or railing. Press your upper abdomen below the ribcage and above your belly button on the object. While leaning against the edge of the object of choice, produce quick upward thrusts until the object is expelled.

Choking is often silent. It is not always easily seen. We may expect a choking person to be coughing loudly. This is usually not the case. Contacting 911 at the onset of an emergency is wise. Ask someone to call while you provide care. Practicing mock Heimlich Maneuvers often before an emergency occurs will give you experience and confidence during the emergency. I have written the steps clearly on a notecard displaying it on the refrigerator to review often. We never know when we will need it. Be prepared. Learn the universal sign for choking and teach it to your children. Keep first things first. Stay calm, ask the Lord for His guidance, think and act.

Rebecca Graeff is a Master Herbalist graduate of The School of Natural Healing, an organic gardener, and educator. She delights in herbal studies and research and strives to encourage everyone around her to continue in their life-long learning of natural health.