



Choking Rescue Heimlich Maneuver

First aid for adults

The Heimlich maneuver is first aid for a blocked airway in an adult. This handout explains some of the causes of a blocked airway and offers tips to prevent choking. Steps for the Heimlich maneuver are given for a conscious adult, for an unconscious adult, and for yourself.

What is the Heimlich maneuver?

The *Heimlich maneuver* (Hime-lik muh-new-ver) is used to help a person who is choking because something is blocking their airway. The airway includes the nose, mouth, throat, *larynx* (voice box), and the *trachea* (breathing tube).

The goal of the Heimlich maneuver is to push air out of the lungs in a forceful “cough.” This “cough” should pop the blockage out of the airway.

What kinds of things can block an airway?

Food is one of the most common causes of choking in adults. An unconscious person can even choke on their own tongue or dentures.

How can you tell if someone has a blocked airway?

- It is important to be able to tell the difference between a blocked airway and other things that stop breathing. Fainting, stroke, heart attack, epilepsy, and drug overdose can also stop breathing. But these problems are treated differently than a blocked airway.
- A conscious (awake) person who has only a partly blocked airway may at first be able to cough and breathe on their own. The person may wheeze (make a high-pitched squeaky sound) when trying to breathe. They may be able to cough up the object on their own.
- If the person’s airway becomes completely blocked, their cough will get weaker. They will not be able to talk or breathe at all, and they may start to turn blue. They may grab their own throat with their thumb and fingers to show you that they cannot breathe.

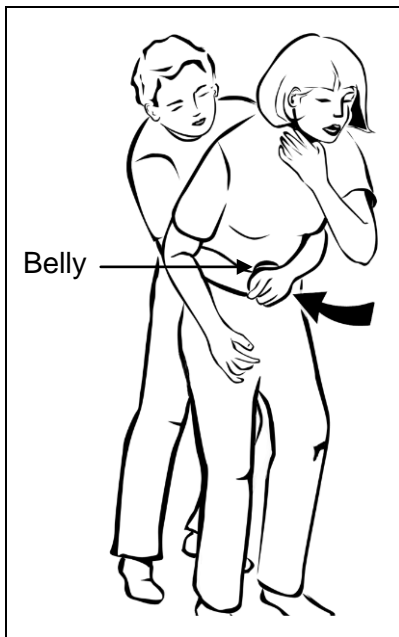
How can you prevent an airway blockage?

A common cause of airway blockages is choking on food. Here are some things you can do to prevent this from happening.

- Cut food into small pieces.
- Chew your food slowly and well, especially if you wear dentures.
- Try not to talk and laugh while you are chewing and swallowing.
- Do not walk, run, or play if you have food in your mouth.
- Some foods that seem harmless are easy to choke on. Some foods like peanuts, peanut butter, popcorn, and other foods must be chewed very well before being swallowed. Do not eat these kinds of foods if you cannot chew well.

How do you do the Heimlich maneuver on another person?

- The first thing to do when someone choking is to find out if the person is OK. Do this by asking loudly, “Are you OK? Can you breathe?”
- If the person says “Yes,” do nothing. Do **not** do the Heimlich maneuver if the person can breathe and talk. This could make it worse.
- If the person nods “NO,” do the Heimlich maneuver using the steps below and on the next page.



Heimlich maneuver on a conscious adult

If the person is standing or sitting:

1. Stand behind the person and wrap your arms around their waist.
2. Make a fist with 1 hand.
3. Place the thumb side of your fist against the middle of the person's belly, just above their belly button. Do **not** put your fist on their ribs or the small bone in the center of the chest where the ribs meet. It is very easy to break this bone and hurt the organs inside the abdomen and chest.
4. Put your other hand over your fist. Press your fist into the person's belly with a quick upward thrust.
5. Continue to repeat the thrusts until the object comes out of the airway or the person becomes unconscious.

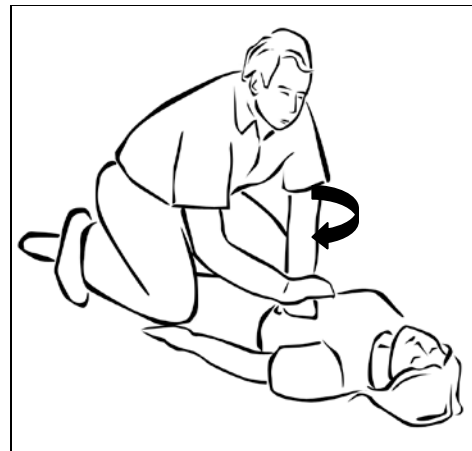
If the person is unconscious:

1. Lay the person down flat on the floor on their back.
2. Kneel over the person with 1 knee beside each thigh.
3. Put the heel of 1 hand against the middle of the person's belly just above the navel. Make sure your hand is below the ribs and the bone where the ribs meet.
4. Put your second hand directly on top of the first. Press into the person's abdomen with a quick upward thrust. Several thrusts may be needed to clear the airway.
5. Check the person's mouth to see if the object has popped out. This should **not** be done if the person is having a seizure (*convulsion*).
6. Open the person's mouth by holding their tongue and lower jaw between your thumb and fingers. Lift their jaw up. This will pull the tongue away from the back of their throat so you can see into their throat.
7. Put your first finger of your other hand down along the inside of the person's cheek. Move your finger deeply into their throat to the bottom of the tongue. Use a hooking action to loosen the object and pull it out of the throat into their mouth. Then take the object out of their mouth.
8. If the object has not come out, repeat the thrusts. Continue doing the thrusts until the object comes out of the airway.
9. Once the object comes out, check to see if the person has started to breathe on their own.

If the person is breathing on their own, turn them on their side. Turn them in a way that their head, shoulders, chest, and belly move at the same time.

Do **not** move the person if they have injuries to their head, neck, or back. Watch the person closely.

If the person does not start breathing on their own, start CPR and call 9-1-1.



Heimlich maneuver on an unconscious adult

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Otolaryngology Clinic:
206-598-4022

Other clinics that can provide information are:

Rehabilitation Medicine/
Muscular Dystrophy
Clinic: 206-598-4295

Pulmonary Medicine
Clinic: 206-598-4615

How do you do the Heimlich maneuver on yourself?

Follow these steps:

1. Make a fist with 1 hand.
2. Place the thumb side of your fist against the middle of your belly, just above your belly button. Do **not** put your fist on your ribs or on the small bone in the center of your chest where your ribs meet.
3. Put your other hand over your fist. Press your fist into your belly with a quick upward thrust. Repeat the thrusts until the object comes out of your airway.
4. If this method is not working, press your upper belly quickly over any hard surface. The back of a chair, side of a table, or porch railing works well. Several thrusts may be needed to clear your airway.



Heimlich maneuver on yourself

To Learn More

If you want to learn more about the Heimlich maneuver or CPR, you can take a class and become certified. Check your local community for classes.

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