



Institute For  
Addressing  
Strangulation

This leaflet provides general information about strangulation. If you have been a victim of strangulation and would like more information about accessing healthcare and/or reporting to the police, please see our victim information leaflet: <https://ifas.org.uk/information-leaflet-for-victims/>

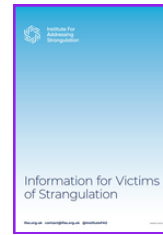


# Strangulation and 'Choking' Factsheet

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## What is strangulation?

Strangulation happens when external pressure is applied to the neck. This pressure can lead to the blood vessels and/or airway in the neck being squashed/restricted. This results in difficulty breathing and/or a reduction in the circulation of the blood, reducing oxygen to the brain. People can be strangled, or strangle themselves, in different ways. It could be by a hand or hands on the neck, being put in a chokehold/headlock or by something wrapped tightly around the neck, like a scarf, belt or rope.

### What is 'choking'?

'Choking' is sometimes used as another term for the act of strangulation. Officially, 'choking' is caused by an internal obstruction within the throat, for example when you choke on a piece of food.

When strangulation (external pressure to the neck) is used in the context of consensual sex, it is more commonly referred to as 'choking' or perhaps another term like 'breath play'.

**The act of strangulation/choking can be extremely dangerous, whatever the context, however pressure is applied.**

## What might happen during or after strangulation?

Depending on how much pressure was used and for how long, you might notice the following:

### At the time of being strangled:

- Pain in your neck
- Difficulty or pain with breathing and swallowing
- Eye problems – seeing stars, blurred or loss of vision (sight)
- Hearing problems – loss of hearing, or a ringing, popping or roaring noise
- Unconsciousness
- Strangulation may also cause a loss of control of your bladder or bowel so that you wet or soil yourself
- It might feel scary if you are unable to breath

### After strangulation:

- Pain in your neck
- Difficulty or pain with breathing and swallowing
- Confusion, feeling agitated
- Voice changes, such as a husky or deep voice
- Headache, feeling sick or being sick

When oxygen cannot get to the brain it can cause individuals to experience confusion, disorientation and even memory loss. The confusion will usually settle but it might be that you never have a clear memory of what has occurred.

If someone's brain is not getting oxygen for a long time, or they have experienced strangulation or choking on multiple occasions over a period of time, it can lead to ongoing problems like forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating or making decisions.

**If you are concerned about the impact of strangulation/choking, speak to your GP or seek emergency assistance if required.**



# What does the law say about strangulation?

Strangulation is covered by:

the **Domestic Abuse Act (2021)**:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/section/70>

And the **Serious Crime Act (2015)**:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/9/section/75A>

Under the law in England and Wales, an individual can consent to being strangled or 'choked', but **cannot consent to being seriously harmed or killed** by strangulation. So if an individual is seriously injured during strangulation, the strangler cannot use consent as a defence. Strangulation may therefore have implications for the person doing the strangling (legally) as well as the person being strangled (medically).

A person consents to sexual activity if they make a choice and have the freedom and capacity to make that choice. A person can withdraw their consent at any time during sexual activity. (Sexual Offences Act, s.74-76, 2003: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/42/section/74>)

## Help and support

Applying pressure to the neck, in any context, could lead to serious medical impacts for the person being strangled. If someone does not want to engage in strangulation, there is no reason why they should be strangled. There is no safe way to strangle.

If support is needed after an experience of strangulation, please follow the links below.

- In an emergency, call 999.
- Sexual assault referral centres services (SARCs) in England and Wales: [www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/help-after-rape-and-sexual-assault](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/help-after-rape-and-sexual-assault)
- SafeLives [safelives.org.uk](http://safelives.org.uk) Freephone 24 hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline (England): 0808 2000 247 (run by Refuge)
- Women's Aid live chat service (now open from 8am to 6pm on weekdays / 10am to 6pm on weekends) <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/>
  - Northern Ireland: 0808 802 1414
  - Scotland: 0800 027 1234
  - Wales: 0808 8010 800
- Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327
- Respect helpline, for anyone worried that they may be harming someone else: 0808 802 4040

Strangulation can potentially lead to a stroke. A stroke is a medical emergency.

The **FAST** test can help you recognise the most common signs.

- **F**acial weakness: Can the person smile? Has their mouth or eye drooped?
- **A**rm weakness: Can the person raise both arms?
- **S**peech problems: Can the person speak clearly and understand what you say?
- **T**ime to call 999: if you see any of these signs

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