

# Choking: The Silent Killer?



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**There were over 100 choking related deaths in Care and Nursing homes across the UK last year. That's the equivalent to 2 deaths every week.**

**And due to the way location and cause of death are recorded, this figure is likely to be much higher.**

## But why?

Dysphagia, Parkinson's and Dementia are often cited as reasons why the elderly and infirm present an increased risk of choking.

Most people at some time will experience that feeling when 'something goes down the wrong way' and the instinctive impulse to cough. Choking occurs when an object becomes stuck in a person's airway preventing them from breathing. In 85% of cases it's food that's the problem.

The brain is particularly sensitive to lack of oxygen and after just a few minutes will begin to shut down parts of the body as it desperately tries to survive. Initially, a person's skin will become paler before turning bright blue.

One of the effects of choking is to prevent air from passing over the vocal cords meaning the person choking is unable to speak or make a sound. A change in colour often the first sign that something is wrong.

It takes less than 10 minutes for a person to die from choking, with the 'clock' starting from the moment the airway becomes blocked. This makes the speed of response critical to ensure their survival.

Choking Basic Life Support (BLS) consisting of 5 back blows followed by 5 abdominal thrusts needs to be delivered as soon as possible, with the process repeated until the airway is cleared or the person becomes unresponsive.

Guidelines for delivering back blows are to stand to the side and slightly behind the person choking, whilst supporting their chest and leaning them forward. As most choking incidents involve food, the likelihood of a resident experiencing a choking emergency increases dramatically during mealtimes. Normally whilst they are sat in a chair or wheelchair.

According to the Resuscitation Council, back blows are only successful in half of all attempts. The guidelines for abdominal thrusts are to stand behind the person choking and put both arms around the upper part of the abdomen.

Both these procedures assume the person choking can stand up on their own, something a resident in care or nursing homes may find difficult to do. It may be possible to deliver back blows while they remain seated by leaning them forward in the chair.

Delivering abdominal thrusts, however, is far more difficult as it may be necessary for the carer to support the resident's entire weight. For every resident, it's worth considering if this is both practical, or even possible.

Dechoker is an Airway Clearance Device (ACD) designed to remove the obstruction in a matter of seconds using manually created suction.

In a choking emergency Dechoker is placed over the choking person's mouth and nose. This also positions the tube over the airway and creates an airtight seal. Pulling back on the handle creates a strong suction directly where needed to pull against the obstruction.

Two safety features prevent air being returned back down the airway and also allow two attempts to remove the obstruction without removing the mask. This further increases the effectiveness of the suction.

What's more, Dechoker can be used when the person choking is either sat upright in a chair or wheelchair, or when lying down perhaps in bed or on the floor.

By the end of September this year Dechoker had prevented 7 choking deaths in care and nursing homes in the UK, and many more worldwide.

**WATCH:** To see how easy to use and effective it is, visit our website to watch a video of the Dechoker in action.



Every Dechoker is supplied in a distinctive yellow case which also has an integrated wall mount bracket. This makes it both easily accessible and immediately identifiable in a choking emergency.

Any Dechoker used in a choking emergency will automatically be replaced with a new one.

 Matt Oakley is the Commercial & Operations Director for Dechoker UK. He has been fundamental in bringing the Dechoker to the care sector and both he and his team are passionate about reducing choking deaths.

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