

**South West
Yorkshire Partnership
NHS Foundation Trust**

**Barnsley Speech and Language Therapy
Is My Child Gagging or Choking?**

Babies and some older children may gag when trying new foods. This can be worrying for parents and carers. You may be unsure if your child is gagging or choking.

What is Gagging?

Gagging is how babies protect themselves from choking. It is a normal reflex that can stop food going down the wrong way. Babies can have a very sensitive gag reflex when they first start weaning. As they grow older and try more foods, this gag reflex tends to be less sensitive and moves further back in the mouth. Sometimes older children carry on gagging.

Gagging makes the child push food out of their mouth with their tongue. They can retch. They can look like they will be sick. Children are often happy to carry on eating after this happens.

What Should I Do?

Stay calm as overreacting may scare them. Some children panic and gag more often if they have learned to feel scared when they gag. We want children to learn how to cope with new foods.

Always stay with your child whenever they are eating and drinking. They should be still, well supported and able to stay in an upright sitting position.

What is Choking?

Choking happens when your child's airway is blocked.

They may cough but they will be unable to make any noise like crying. They may not be able to breathe, and their lips or face may turn blue.

First Aid for Choking

There is a free app on emergency first aid including choking called 'Baby and Child First Aid' by British Red Cross. Download this app to your phone to use in an emergency. You can also find local first aid courses online.

Information is also available at [How to stop a child from choking - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/health/a-z/h/how-to-stop-a-child-from-choking)

Telephone: 01226 644331 (answer machine available)

Email: barnsley.speechtherapy@swyt.nhs.uk

Website: www.barnsleyspeechtherapy.co.uk

Facebook: @Barnsley Specialist Children's health

Twitter: @BarnsleySCH

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/c/Barnsleyspeechandlanguagetherapy>



With **all of us** in mind.

Ways to Avoid Choking

Only give your child food that they are able to manage. Depending on their age and/or stage of development you may want to avoid foods that need a lot of chewing, small hard foods like whole nuts, whole grapes, cherry tomatoes, blueberries, hard or chewy sweets, fruits with stones or pips, bony fish and foods that splinter like sharp hard crisps.

Always stay with your child whenever they are eating and drinking. Your child should be still, well supported and able to stay in an upright sitting position.

Differences Between Gagging and Choking

Gagging	Choking
Airway clear	Blocked airway
Retching	Coughing, silent
Breathing	Not breathing
Normal colour	Face/lips turning blue
Normal reflex	Not normal
Don't panic, stay calm	Emergency – start first aid immediately and contact emergency services (999)

If you are unsure if your child is gagging or choking, speak to your health visitor or GP. They can give you further advice and may refer to speech and language therapy for assessment if this is still unclear.

If your child chokes frequently ask a professional involved in your child's care for a referral to Speech and Language Therapy or contact the team at barnsley.speechtherapy@swyt.nhs.uk

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