



Investigating Strangulation and Choking Events

Signs:

- Petechiae (red spots) on eyes, cheeks, or under ears
- Neck Swelling
- Unsteady
- Loss of Memory
- Urination
- Defecation
- Droopy Eyelids or Face
- Tongue Injury
- Lip Injury
- Bruising behind ears or on neck
- Voice Changes
- Possible Loss of Consciousness

Symptoms:

- Neck Pain
- Scalp Pain, Hair Missing (From Pulling)
- Sore Throat
- Vision Changes (Spots, Tunnel Vision)
- Hearing Changes or Ringing in Ears
- Weakness or Numbness in Arms or Legs
- Jaw Pain
- Difficulty Swallowing
- Trouble Breathing or Catching Breath

Medically Transport Immediately If the Victim Has Injuries Which Include:

- Difficulty or Labored Breathing
- Difficulty Swallowing
- Loss of Consciousness
- Urinated During Attack
- Defecated During Attack
- Vision Changes
- Petechial Hemorrhages
- If the Victim is Pregnant

What You Need to Know About Strangulation

Montana Statute: § 45-5-215. STRANGULATION OF PARTNER OR FAMILY MEMBER- purposely or knowingly impedes the normal breathing or circulation of the blood of a partner or family member by: (a) Applying pressure on the throat or neck of the partner or family member; or (b) Blocking air flow to the nose or mouth of the partner.

Terminology: *Strangulation* is the external compression of the neck and can impede blood flow (oxygen) to or from the brain through direct compression. *Choking* refers to an object in the upper airway that impedes oxygen intake and can occur intentionally or accidentally. Focus on the facts of the case rather than the terminology to correctly assess the situation¹.

Visible Injuries. Typically, only **50%** of strangulation victims have visible injuries, and only **15%** have injuries that can be photographed by police².

Pressure: It takes very little pressure to cause fatal injury, only **4** pounds of pressure to block the jugular vein, **11** to block the carotid arteries, and **33** pounds to block the trachea⁴. *Opening a can of soda requires only 20 pounds of pressure*⁵

Risk. The average time it takes for a victim to lose consciousness is only **7-10** seconds. Only **15** seconds of strangulation can lead to brain infarct (stroke) and only **30** seconds of strangulation to lead to cardiac arrest. Brain death can occur in as little as **4-5** minutes³.

Impact: Millions of brain cells die each second that the brain is deprived of oxygen due to strangulation causing irreparable damage. Symptoms of asphyxiation from strangulation include, but are not limited to, loss of memory, inability to concentrate, fight or flight response, difficulty speaking.⁶ Victims should not be expected to calmly describe or reenact details of a near-death experience.

Future Danger. Strangulation is a high-risk factor for lethality often referred to by experts as "the last warning sign" before homicide. **43%** of all domestic homicide victims experience at least one episode of attempted strangulation⁷. A victim who experiences a non-fatal strangulation event is **750%** more likely to be killed by that partner⁸.

Death can occur up to two weeks after the attack! As a direct result of strangulation victims may develop fatal complications such as blood clots, carotid dissection, respiratory complications (such as pneumonia), cardiac arrest, stroke hours to weeks later⁹.

Children are present during 37% of all strangulation events!

¹ Strack and Gwinn, On the Edge of Homicide: Strangulation as a Prelude, ABA Criminal Justice, 26:3 (2011)

² Strack, McClane & Hawley, A review of 300 attempted strangulation Cases: Part 1: Criminal Legal issues, Journal of Emergency Medicine, 21(3), 303-309, (2001)

³ Stapczynski, Strangulation Injuries, Emergency Medicine Reports (2010).

⁴ Armstrong & Strack, Recognition and Documentation of Strangulation Crimes, JAMA Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery, 142(9):891-7 (2016)

⁵ Smock, Strangulation Presentation in Pulaski, Virginia, 2019

⁶ Saver, Time is Brain – Quantified, Stroke, 37: 263-266 (2006)

⁷ Shabazz, Strangulation: The Red Flag of Domestic Violence That We Never Discuss, The Training Institute for Strangulation Prevention (2019)

⁸ Glass, et al, Non-Fatal Strangulation is an Important Factor for Homicide of Women, 35 Journal of Emergency Medicine. 3:329 (2008)

⁹ Clarot, et al, Fatal and non-fatal bilateral delayed carotid artery dissection after manual strangulation, Forensic Science International 149 (2005)
