

Help! My Dog Is Choking!

Would you know what to do if your dog choked on food or a toy? The procedures are different for small versus large dogs, so don't be caught off guard not knowing. Learn the steps now so you can act immediately if and when it happens.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Most often, choking in dogs is caused by a foreign object stuck in the throat, such as a toy or piece of food
- If you can see a foreign object in your dog's mouth and can easily remove it, do so; large objects may be dislodged by placing your thumbs under the jaw, near the base of the throat, and pushing forward
- If your dog is small enough, suspend him with his head pointed down; for larger dogs, lift his rear legs like a wheelbarrow so his head is tilted downward
- Next, try administering a sharp blow to the dog's back, between the shoulder blades, to dislodge the object
- If that doesn't work, use the Heimlich maneuver to dislodge the object
- Emergency veterinary care is often warranted, so while you can quickly try these steps to dislodge the obstruction, if it's not working right away, seek emergency care

The experience of your dog choking is one you'll never forget, but knowing what to do in that moment could save your dog's life. Most often, choking in dogs is caused by a foreign object stuck in the throat, such as a toy or piece of food. Choking can also occur due to an allergic reaction that causes your dog's throat to swell, or due to constriction of the neck by a collar or leash.

The steps that follow will help a dog that's choking due to an obstruction. Common choking hazards include small balls, rawhide chews, bones and elk antlers. Sticks and stones can also become lodged in your dog's throat. The first sign your dog may be choking is typically coughing. Your dog may also drool, paw at his mouth, gag, retch or paw at his face.

A choking dog may also rub his face on the ground and appear to be anxious and in distress. A high-pitched squeak or whistling noise may also occur, along with difficulty breathing, regurgitation or collapse.¹

Emergency veterinary care is often warranted, so while you can quickly try the steps that follow to dislodge the obstruction, if it's not working right away, seek emergency care. Even if you're able to dislodge the object at home, you should still seek veterinary care afterward to be sure your dog isn't injured.

Try to Remove the Obstruction

If you notice your dog choking, first check for an obstruction. If you can see a foreign object in your dog's mouth and can easily remove it, do so. Large objects may be dislodged by placing your thumbs under the jaw, near the base of the throat, and pushing forward.²

If you cannot dislodge the item and your dog is small enough, suspend him with his head pointed down. For larger dogs, lift his rear legs like a wheelbarrow so his head is tilted downward. This may help to dislodge the obstruction. You can also try administering a sharp blow to the dog's back, between the shoulder blades, to try to dislodge the object.³

If your dog is unconscious, you can also use your finger to try to sweep the object from his mouth or throat. Dr. Shea Cox, founder of BluePearl Pet Hospice, explained:⁴

"If your dog is unconscious, perform a finger sweep. Open your dog's mouth and do a finger sweep by placing your finger along the inside of the mouth, sliding it down toward the center of the throat over the base of the tongue, and gently "sweeping" toward the center to remove any foreign material.

Warning: *There is a structure deep in the throat (the Adam's apple) that feels like a smooth bone. Do not attempt to pull it out!"*

Use the Heimlich Maneuver

- Position your dog with their diaphragm accessible, either lying down on their side or standing up
- Wrap both arms around the dog's abdomen
- Apply pressure under the rib cage using your palm
- Make firm thrusting motions in an inward and upward direction
- Repeat five times until obstruction is removed
- Check the dog's mouth for the object and remove it

If the dog is unconscious, perform the maneuver with him lying on her side. If your pet is a small dog (or cat), pick her up facing away from you, and gently tilt his body downward. Push forward and up on his belly using quick thrusts. You can also hold him back against your chest as you thrust upward.

If the Heimlich maneuver isn't working, or you're unable to perform it effectively because of the dog's size or anxiety level, transport your dog to an emergency veterinary hospital as quickly as possible. You can also attempt to perform CPR if necessary. Pet guardians may wish to get **[certified in pet CPR here](#)**.

Remove Choking Hazards From Your Home

The best way to protect your pet from choking is to remove common choking hazards from around your home. In a study of complications following the removal of foreign bodies from dogs' throats, the majority of the foreign bodies — 77.4% — were bones of all types (real cooked and raw bones as well as synthetic and manufactured "bones").⁶

Any chews or recreational bones you give your dog should be large enough so that they cannot be consumed or swallowed (intentionally or unintentionally), and you'll want to monitor chewing to ensure no pieces break off. If you have a large dog, do not offer a small-sized chews, even if you think he's a gentle chewer. When you give your dog treats, be sure they're cut into small, bite-sized pieces.

Toys are another hazard to be aware of. Any object that's smaller than your pet's windpipe or back of throat can pose a choking hazard if it gets stuck, but balls are especially dangerous. Some toy makers have size charts to help you determine the right size ball or chew toy for your pet, but, generally speaking, look for a size that's comfortable for your pet to hold in his mouth but not small enough that he could accidentally swallow it.

While it may be impossible to remove every potential choking hazard, especially if your dog likes to consume foreign objects like rocks from your backyard, keeping a close eye on your pup when he's chewing on a recreational bone or toy is the best way to keep him safe. If you notice small pieces coming off or the object appears to be small enough to go down your dog's throat, take it away immediately.

Sources and References

^{1, 2, 5} [Yahoo Life October 7, 2021](#)

^{3, 4} [The Wildest, August 17, 2023](#)

⁶ [Aust Vet J. 2019 Apr;97\(4\):116-121. doi: 10.1111/avj.12796](#)
