

What is Non-Fatal Strangulation?

Non-Fatal Strangulation (NFS) is when a person has survived “having pressure applied over the neck by any means”. It may also be called “choking” by some people. This pressure might be applied by one or two hands, a forearm (chokehold), a knee, a foot, or by having something put around the neck and tightened such as a belt, cord, scarf, necklace or strap.

NFS can occur once or many times by different methods. Each time is dangerous.

Why Non-Fatal Strangulation is dangerous to your health

Pressure applied to the neck may damage important blood vessels or the windpipe (airway). This can damage the brain due to lack of oxygen.

Brain damage or even death may happen within minutes but can sometimes occur weeks or months later.

Blood vessels in the neck can partially tear or clot and this can result in a stroke.

The thyroid gland may be damaged. Some people experience on-going problems with swallowing and speaking. Some people go on to develop mental health issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Why Non-Fatal Strangulation is dangerous for your safety

NFS is one of the most lethal types of Domestic and Family Violence and is a form of power and control. People who have been strangled or “choked” by an intimate partner (husband, boyfriend, girlfriend, defacto or ex) are at greater risk of severe violence or even being killed by that partner.

What might be experienced at the time of Non-Fatal Strangulation

During or after NFS people may report:

- having difficulty breathing
- seeing spots or tunnel vision
- a ringing or buzzing in the ears
- dizziness
- loss of consciousness (blacking out)
- loss of control of their bladder or bowel (peeing or pooing themselves)
- a change in their voice (husky voice or being unable to speak)
- neck pain or tenderness
- memory loss (gaps in time)
- confusion.

What injuries might be seen after Non-Fatal Strangulation?

Sometimes people have injuries on their face, neck and body after an episode of NFS. This does not happen every time. Studies show that only half (50%) of people who have experienced NFS have one or more of:

- bruises to the neck
- bruises behind the ear/s
- scratches on the neck or under the chin
- small red pin-point spots on the face, ears, eyes, neck or chest (may look flushed or “sunburnt”)
- bloodshot eyes
- bleeding into the whites of the eyes
- swollen face, mouth and/or neck.

Non-Fatal Strangulation as part of consensual sexual activity

Some people may experiment with strangulation during consensual sex. Pressure applied to the neck is always potentially dangerous to your health and can be fatal. If someone asks to strangle you as part of sex, remember it is NOT safe.



What to do if you have experienced Non-Fatal Strangulation

You may feel there are other priorities rather than seeing a doctor and you may have other injuries which may seem more serious to you. However, after the NFS, even if you have no injuries, it is very important to see a doctor as soon as possible and tell them what has happened. The doctor will be able to examine you and advise if any tests are needed to make sure you are okay.

Important Information

- Dial (000) for immediate medical attention, if you experience difficulty breathing, notice any weakness on one side of your body or find it difficult to speak.
- Breathing difficulties can be delayed for up to 36 hours. Make sure a responsible adult stays with you for the next 1 to 2 days.
- You can have long term medical and mental health issues after an episode of NFS.
- If you experienced NFS by your intimate partner you are more likely to be killed by that partner at a later stage.

If you feel unsafe or at risk of further violence, you can contact any of the following agencies for advice and support:

- **WA Police – Emergency (000) or Assistance (131 444)**
- **Crisis Care (08) 9223 1111 or Country 1800 199 008**
- **Women’s Domestic Violence Helpline (08) 9223 1188 or Country 1800 007 339**
- **Local Hospital Emergency Department**
- **Your General Practitioner**
- **1800-RESPECT (1800-555-677)**

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

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Non-Fatal Strangulation (NFS) patient information



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