

# Strangulation & Suffocation

**Strangulation** is a form of **asphyxia** (lack of oxygen) characterised by closure of the blood vessels and or air passages of the neck as a result of external pressure on the neck.

**Suffocation** is to deprive a person of air which affects their normal breathing.

## Non-Fatal Strangulation and Suffocation Laws

**Domestic Abuse Act 2021,**

A person commits an **offence of non-fatal strangulation** if they intentionally strangle another person.

An **offence of non-fatal suffocation** is where a person does **any other activity** that affects someone's ability to breathe and constitutes battery.

### Signs:

- **Redness of the neck** – may be fleeting
- **Scratch marks** – victim or suspects
- **Bruises** – may not appear for some time
- **Finger tip bruises** are circular, oval and often faint
- **Tiny red spots** (petechiae) – ruptured capillaries. Found anywhere above the area of constriction. (Jugular restriction)
- **Blood red eyes** are due to capillary rupture in the white portion of the eyes. May suggest a vigorous struggle or intermittent pressure.
- **Swelling of the neck** may be caused by any one of the following: internal bleeding, or an injury of any of the underlying neck structures.

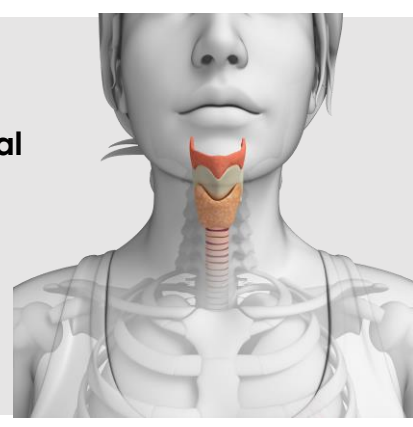
### Symptoms:

**Voice** changes - Complete loss of voice - Difficulty **swallowing** - Difficulty **breathing** - Raspy breathing - Pain or **tenderness** on touch or movement - Involuntary urination or defecation, Coughing/ vomiting - **Vision** changes - Loss of **consciousness** - Tongue/lip injury - Headache, Seizure - Light **headedness**, - Weakness or **numbness** to arms or legs, Vision changes (spots, tunnel vision - flashing lights) - **Hearing** changes - Sore throat, Jaw/**neck pain** - **Mental status changes** = Restlessness or combativeness, feeling out of touch with reality, memory loss.

### Delayed Consequences:

Victims may look fine and say they are fine, but just underneath the skin there could be **internal injury** and/ or **delayed complications**. Internal injury may take a few hours to be appreciated.

The victim may develop **delayed swelling**, haematoma, vocal cord immobility, displaced laryngeal (voice box) fractures, fractured neck bone, airway obstruction, stroke or even delayed death from a tear in a neck artery, blood clot, breathing complications, brain damage.



## Stages of Strangulation & Suffocation

**Disbelief:** Victim cannot believe they are being strangled. Very short in duration.

**Primal:** Victim fights with whatever means to stop the strangling or suffocation.

**Resignation:** Victim gives up, feeling they can do nothing and go limp.

**Victims who decline Medical Care**  
**Discuss** the warning signs, **Advise** victim to log the symptoms, **Encourage** victim to seek medical attention if symptoms persist, **Next 24-28 hours could be critical**  
**Consider capacity** to decline medical care.  
**For example:** due to being highly traumatised.

### A Study of 14 victims found the following Strangulation Timeline.

