

## Non-Fatal Strangulation/Suffocation (NFSS) Assessment Service

These are specialist services with clinicians who are trained to care for people who have been strangled or suffocated.

You may be offered, as needed:

- ✓ Physical health assessment to check for any current or long-term risks
- ✓ Referrals for further medical care
- ✓ Emotional wellbeing assessment and referrals for further support
- ✓ Medical certificates and completion of ACC45
- ✓ Forensic assessment to document symptoms or signs for potential police investigations (this does not require you to pursue a case)

### NFSS assessment service appointment

- By referral only
- 1.5-2 hours long
- Weekdays
- **FREE**



For more information on non-fatal strangulation/suffocation (NFSS) and the medical help available, please scan the QR code to visit: [mediac.org.nz/nfss](https://mediac.org.nz/nfss)

Family violence is never ok and if you would like some support around safety, please contact at any time (24/7):

Police - 111  
Womens Refuge - 0800 733 843  
SafeToTalk - 0800 044 334  
Shine - 0508 744 633

Call an ambulance or go to the Emergency Department if you are pregnant or have:

- Breathing difficulties
- Problems swallowing (trouble eating or drinking)
- Swelling of your tongue
- Confusion, drowsiness or had loss of consciousness
- Fainted or had seizures
- Vomited two or more times
- Numbness/weakness, or trouble walking/balancing
- Vision changes or difficulty speaking

### You may also notice:

- Headache, dizziness, tiredness, or irritability
- Trouble concentrating or remembering things
- Bruises, scratches or marks on your face/neck
- Redness in your eyes
- Voice changes, coughing, or discomfort when swallowing

These symptoms usually get better on their own.

If your symptoms get worse or do not improve, contact your doctor.

### Recovery Advice

Make sure you have a trusted support person with you whenever possible.

- **Medication & drugs:** Take paracetamol for pain. Avoid sleeping pills, alcohol, and drugs.
- **Driving:** DO NOT drive for the first 24 hours, or longer if you're not feeling well enough.
- **Rest & exercise:** Rest from work/school/activities if needed. Avoid activities that could cause a head knock for at least three weeks.
- **Eating:** Eat and drink as usual.



# Non-Fatal Strangulation & Suffocation

## PATIENT INFORMATION

[mediac.org.nz/nfss](https://mediac.org.nz/nfss)

## What is strangulation & suffocation?

**Strangulation** (sometimes called "choking") happens when pressure on the neck blocks airflow or blood flow. This can happen in different ways such as:

- Hand/s, forearm, or a foot
- A cord around the neck
- A necklace or chain
- A hood or scarf

**Suffocation** occurs when fresh air cannot move into the lungs, making it hard to breathe. This can happen by blocking the mouth and nose in ways such as:

- With a hand
- Using a pillow or clothing
- Being held under water
- Something stuffed into the mouth (e.g. socks or an item of clothing)
- Having a heavy weight on your chest (e.g. being sat on)

Both decrease oxygen to the brain and are dangerous forms of assault.

They can cause serious injury or death. In Aotearoa New Zealand, non-fatal strangulation and suffocation (NFSS) is a crime. The law recognises how dangerous it is, and those found guilty can face up to seven years in prison.

## Health risks & symptoms

Decreased oxygen can cause brain injury, similar to a concussion.

Strangulation and suffocation can cause severe internal injuries. It is not unusual for there to be no visible injuries, even when serious damage has occurred. Symptoms can worsen or appear hours or even days later, so it's important to monitor how you feel and seek medical help if anything changes.

**If you are pregnant, there is high risk to your baby.**

**Your safety matters.** A medical assessment is essential. Referral to a specialist **Non-Fatal Strangulation/Suffocation (NFSS) Assessment Service** is recommended.

## Long-term effects

Being strangled or suffocated is a life-threatening event. It can continue to affect you after any physical injuries have healed.

You may experience:

- Trouble sleeping
- Flashbacks or upsetting memories of the event
- Feeling anxious or worried
- Feeling scared
- Feeling irritable, sad or upset
- Thoughts of hurting yourself or ending your life

If you have any of these, it is really important to reach out for support. Contact your doctor or someone you trust.

## Safety

If your partner has ever strangled or suffocated you, even just once, your risk of being killed by them is over seven times higher than if you had experienced other forms of physical violence. This kind of abuse is extremely serious.

They are both frightening experiences and are powerful ways for someone to exert control and dominance. They can cause serious physical and emotional harm, even if there are no injuries visible.

**Strangulation/Suffocation Is Never Safe - Even During Sex**

Some people may use strangulation, sometimes called "choking" or "breath play", during sex. This might be something you agreed to, or something your partner did.

Even if you've said "yes" before, you always have the right to say "no" or change your mind at any time.

The serious effects of strangulation and suffocation are the same regardless of how they occurred. Even when it was something you wanted to happen. They are always dangerous. There is no safe way to "choke" someone.