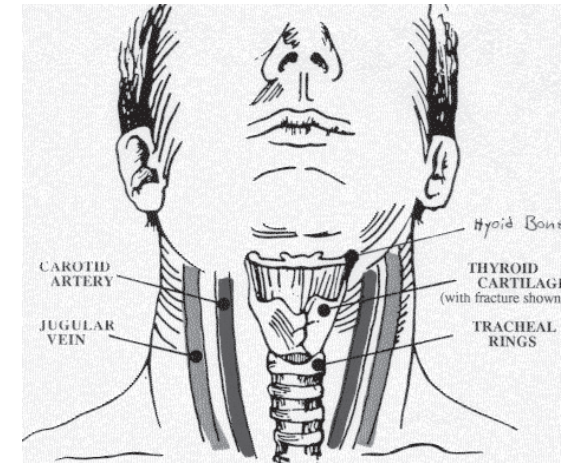


# Strangulation

*A Quick Reference Guide  
for Law Enforcement*



**Strangulation is not choking**, which is what occurs when the windpipe is blocked internally by an object such as food.

**Strangulation** is the act of using some type of mechanism such as the hands, elbows, arms or ligature on the neck to obstruct the blood vessels or airway of the neck of a victim causing asphyxia, injuries and/or death.

Based on the mechanism of attack and the victim's signs and symptoms, should be charged under Aggravated Assault Statute. **O.C.G.A. § 16-5-21.**

Absence of a visible injury is common and should not be the deciding factor when choosing whether to charge as a felony. Loss of consciousness is **not** a requirement under the law.

Provided by the Offices of the Fulton County Solicitor General and the Fulton County District Attorney

## 2014 Law Change

**O.C.G.A. § 16-5-21** now includes language specifying strangulation and suffocation as a subsection of the Aggravated Assault statute. As used in this code section "strangulation" and "suffocation" means impeding the normal breathing or circulation of blood of another person by applying pressure to the throat or neck of such person or by obstructing the nose and mouth of such person.

The act of strangulation is the crime, not the extent of the injury. Loss of consciousness or injuries are not a requirement of the felony statute.

### Follow-up Questions

- Tell me how you feel now.
- Have any new injuries appeared?
- Do you feel pain anywhere-Describe.
- Does your voice sound the same?
- When you eat does it feel any different? Describe.
- When you swallow does it feel different? Describe.
- Have you heard from the suspect?
- Please tell me what you remember about the assault. (Going for more details)
- What made the suspect stop the strangulation? Witnesses intervened, stopped on his/her own, etc.
- Is there anything you want to talk about that we have not discussed?

We gratefully acknowledge the National Family Justice Center Alliance and Agnew and Heisler for allowing us to reproduce, in part or in whole, the 2011 Strangulation Guide for California Law Enforcement

Thank you also to the Prosecuting Attorneys' Council of GA for the use of information from their 2014 Georgia Family Violence Newsletter

For more information contact Amanda Planchard 404-612-2579

## Stages of Strangulation

Disbelief	Victim cannot believe they are being strangled. Very short in duration.
Realization	This is really happening. Focus is on survival-struggling to breathe and trying to make abuser stop, sometimes trying to placate or acting submissive/limp.
Primal	Victim fights with whatever means to stop the strangling. <i>Ask the victim what they did to get away or stop the attack. This may explain injuries.</i>
Resignation	Victim gives up, feeling they can do nothing and go limp, begin to lose consciousness <i>Ask the victim what they were thinking about. What did they think was going to happen?</i>

### Indicators of Loss of Consciousness:

- Loss of memory
- Standing, then waking up on the floor
- Unexplained bump on the head
- Loss of control of bowel or bladder
- A witness to the loss of consciousness

### Victims who decline Medical Care

- Encourage medical treatment
- Discuss the warning signs
- Advise victim to log their symptoms
- Encourage victim to seek medical attention if symptoms persist
- The next 24-48 hours are most dangerous

## Symptoms

- Voice Changes, raspy voice**
- Complete loss of voice**
- Difficulty swallowing**
- Difficulty breathing**
- Raspy breathing, sounding “out of breath”**
- Lightheadedness, dizziness, headache**
- Pain or tenderness on touch or movement**
- Mental status changes**
  - Restlessness or combativeness
  - Psychosis, amnesia
- Involuntary urination or defecation**
- Coughing / vomiting**
- Sore throat/ trouble swallowing**
- Numbness of extremities**
- Headache/dizziness**
- Vision changes**
- Loss of consciousness**

## Signs (Over 50%- no visible injury)

- Redness of the neck-** may be fleeting
- Scratch marks-** victim or suspect
- Bruises** - may not appear for some time
- Finger-tip bruises** are circular and 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 or combination of the following: internal bleeding, or an injury of any of the underlying neck structures.

## Strangulation Questions

Ask the victim to describe how they were strangled. Was it-one or two hands, forearm, object, etc.

What did the suspect say before, during and after they strangled the victim?

Describe what suspect’s face looked like during strangulation.

Was the victim shaken simultaneously while being strangled?

Was the victim thrown or held against the wall, floor, or ground? Describe how and the results? Describe the surface area.

How long did the suspect strangle the victim? Was the victim also smothered?

How many times was the victim strangled? Describe each incident and method.

How much pressure was used? Describe it on scale of 1-10 and was it continuous?

What did the victim think was going to happen/ what were they thinking during?

What caused the suspect to stop?

Any difficulty breathing during the assault or now?

Describe any voice changes.  
Any complaint of pain to the throat?

Any coughing or trouble swallowing?

How did the victim feel during the assault? (dizzy, nauseous, loss of consciousness)

How does the victim feel now?

Did the victim experience any visual changes during the strangling?

Did the victim vomit, urinate or defecate as a result of being strangled?

Was the suspect wearing any rings or other jewelry? Look for marks from these objects.

Did the victim do anything to try and stop the assault? Will the suspect have injuries?

Look for injuries behind the ears, all around the neck, under the chin and jaw, eyelids, shoulders and chest area.

Ask the victim to look in a mirror and point out injury sites including petechiae.

Any visible injury? Photograph injuries and the entire area. Photograph the lack of injury and any areas the victim feels pain.

Any object used? Document where it came from. Photograph and book the item as evidence.

Are there prior incidents of strangulation? Prior domestic violence? Prior threats?

**Encourage medical treatment.** Victims often do not understand the dangers of strangulation. Victims can die up to 72 hours after the assault due to internal injuries.