

THE CHOKING GAME

Other names:

The practice goes by many other names, such as: *Airplaning, America dream game, Black out game, Breath Play, California Choke, California Dreaming, California High, Choke Out, Dream game, Dreaming game, Fainting game, Flatline game, Flat liner, Flatliner game, Funky Chicken, Hyperventilation game, Knockout game, Pass-out game, Passing out game, Natural high, Space cowboy, Space monkey, Suffocation game, Suffocation roulette, Teen choking game, and Tingling game.*

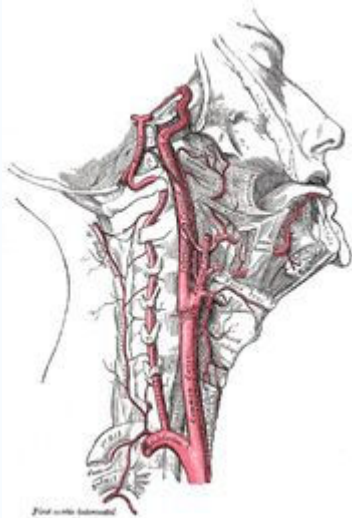
The **choking game**, also commonly known as the **fainting game**, is a potentially lethal activity involving the inducement of unconsciousness or near unconsciousness by restriction of the supply of oxygen to the brain. The attractions are that it can induce a brief sense of euphoria, it is done as a dare or game of chicken, it is reported to enhance erotic feelings, it is amusing to some to watch others losing consciousness or behaving erratically, the prospect of an altered state of consciousness or, more recently, copycatting elements of the film *Flatliners*. The shortlived euphoric effects are generally the result of hypocapnia or hypoxia (not adrenaline as commonly believed).

The activity has been “passed down” by 9-15 year old boys and is responsible for a large number of deaths and permanent disabilities. The activity is traditional and world-wide but became prominent in the United States in early 2005 when a number of deaths and injuries resulting from this activity were publicized.

The object of the 'game' is asphyxiation, as in, to apply pressure to restrict oxygen and/or blood flow to the brain of the victim therefore creating a desired 'floaty', 'tingling', 'high' sensation. The 'high' are the cells of the brain seizing and beginning the process of permanent cell death. When the victim becomes unconscious, the pressure is released and the secondary 'high' of the oxygen/blood rushing to the brain is achieved. If the victim is alone - upon unconsciousness there is no one to release the pressure and the victims own body weight continues to tighten the ligature usually resulting in death.

How the choking game works:

There are actually two distinct methods involved in the Choking Game, both resulting in unconsciousness by depriving the brain of oxygen. (The two tend to get confused or treated as one). The two mechanisms are **strangulation** and **self-induced hypocapnia** and work as follows:



The vulnerable carotid artery, (large, red tube), and the vagus nerve running parallel on its left

1. Strangulation restricts the blood flow to the brain by compressing the **carotid artery** in the neck. This is achieved either by pressing the thumbs against the arteries on both sides of the neck simultaneously or the use of a ligature. Apart from the direct restriction of blood to the brain there are two other significant physiological responses to pressing on the neck:

- Pressing on the carotid arteries also presses on baroreceptors known as the carotid sinus bodies. These bodies then cause vasodilation in the brain leading to insufficient blood to perfuse the brain with oxygen and maintain consciousness.
- A message is also sent via the vagus nerve to the main pacemaker of the heart to decrease the rate and volume of the heartbeat, typically by up to a third. [1] In some cases there is evidence that this may escalate into asystole, a form of cardiac arrest that is difficult to treat. The vulnerability of the victim and speed of onset is unpredictable and not properly understood. There is a dissenting view on the full extent of this but it is agreed that pressure on the vagus nerve causes changes to pulse rate and blood pressure and is dangerous in cases of carotid sinus hypersensitivity.

The use of thumbs on the neck can be self-induced and usually stops automatically on blackout. Where an assistant applies hand pressure, and in all cases where a ligature is used, stopping at the right moment before permanent damage occurs becomes a judgement on the part of the operator or just good luck. Self-strangulation through the use of a ligature is the most common cause of death or brain damage although many schoolchildren have accidentally killed or caused permanent brain damage to their friends by all methods. It is believed that many deaths attributed to suicide by adolescents are actually solo self-asphyxiations and death was an unintended outcome.

2. Self-induced hypocapnia. This involves no compression of the neck but requires hyperventilation for a minute, or until symptoms of hypocapnia such as tingling, light-headedness or dizziness are felt, followed by a breath-hold. The effect is greatly enhanced if lung air pressure is increased by holding the breath 'hard', that is forcing exhalation while allowing no air to escape. This alone is enough to cause a blackout but usually tradition requires one of a number of other actions such as a bear hug given from behind or pressure applied by another

person under or over the heart. The fact that hyperventilation causes rapid cerebral hypoxia is paradoxical because the body should be well stocked with oxygen after overbreathing.

The symptoms of alkalosis are: neuromuscular irritability, muscular spasms, tingling and numbness of the extremities and around the mouth, and a dizziness, or giddiness, often interpreted as a sense of euphoria. *This brief euphoria is what practitioners of the fainting game seek.*

In some traditional versions the bear hug is replaced by pressure on the neck, in which case blackout is a hybrid of strangulation and self-induced hypocapnia.

Other mechanisms. Unconsciousness may be induced by other methods: Pressure over the carotid sinus above the heart may induce a syncope (fainting) without any other action at all but this is difficult to reproduce and is not the basis of the game. For those people susceptible to carotid sinus syncope, and most people would be unaware until it occurs, this can be an exceedingly dangerous game.

In both *strangulation* and *self-induced hypocapnia* blackouts the victim may experience dreaming or hallucinations, though fleetingly, and regains consciousness with involuntary movement of their hands or feet much to the amusement of the onlookers. Full recovery is usually made within seconds but these activities cause many deaths and invalidities every year, particularly when played alone or with a ligature. Permanent brain damage may not be immediately apparent.

What are the results of 'playing' the 'choking game'?

When oxygen and/or blood is deprived from the brain, immediately CELLS DIE. Any of these could happen the FIRST time.

- Bruises/concussions
(from falling after passing out)
- Short term memory loss
- Seizures
- Brain Death (permanent vegetative state)
- Brain Damage
- Retinal hemorrhaging
- Stroke
- UNEXPECTED DEATH

Are there warning signs to look for?

Injury and death have occurred without any of these warning signs being present.

- Inexplicable bruising or red marks around the neck
- Ligatures (bed sheets, belts, tee-shirts, ties, ropes) tied in strange knots and/or found in unusual places
- Frequent severe headaches

- Wear marks on furniture (bunk beds, closet rods) from previous incidences
- Disorientation and/or grogginess after being alone
- Unusual need for privacy (locked bedroom doors)
- Bloodshot eyes, pinpoint bruising around the eyes
- Changes in attitude (aggressive behavior)

What is the best prevention?

Most children have no clue how dangerous this activity is. Most parents have no clue that kids are doing this until someone in their lives dies or are damaged by it. Medical examiners and police continue to classify these deaths as suicide by hanging when there is no evidence that the child intended to take his life.

Essential is to talk to the children about the dangers - keeping in mind they feel it's 'just passing out' because it's not doing drugs or illegal. Tell them that EVERY time they are risking DEATH -either their brain cells or themselves.

If a child is actively participating in the Choking Game:

- Increase supervision- be aware of your child's activities and whereabouts
- Remove any paraphernalia that could be used as a ligature.
- Alert school personnel (principal, nurse, counselor, school police, teachers, etc.) If one student is involved, there probably are others involved.
- Alert the parents of your children's friends.
- Consult with a physician to explore and address any health needs that have resulted due to participation in this activity.
- If an older teen is involved, younger children in the same family may be at risk for participating in this activity.