Understanding Strangulation (Choking):

A Guide to Medical Care and Resources

Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence

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Overview

What is Strangulation

Strangulation, mistakenly called "choking", happens when pressure on the neck blocks oxygen and/or blood flow to the neck and brain. It is commonly used in intimate partner violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, and other forms of domestic and Gender-Based violence. The two most common ways people strangle are manual and ligature.

- Manual strangulation involves using one or two hands, a chokehold, a forearm, a foot, or pressing an object against the neck.
- Ligature strangulation involves using a cord-like object such as a rope, belt, or computer cable.

Even when there are no visible injuries, it can lead to serious and long-lasting health problems, including Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

Understanding Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

TBI happens when the brain is hurt by a sudden blow or attack. It can change how a person thinks, moves, talks, or acts—sometimes for a short time, and sometimes for life. Strangulation can cause TBI either by stopping oxygen to the brain or by the force of the injury itself. It can result in serious long-term complications which can interfere with a person's ability to do daily activities.

Strangulation and Increased Risk of Murder

Research shows that women who survive strangulation by an intimate partner are seven times more likely to become victims of attempted murder and eight times more likely to be killed by that same partner.[1] Strangulation is often the final warning sign before deadly violence. **No form of strangulation is risk free, even a single incident can be deadly**. If you have experienced strangulation or any form of domestic and Gender-Based violence, you can find help by visiting the NYC HOPE Resource Directory (https://www.nyc.gov/content/nychope/pages/neighborhood-resources) or by checking the resources listed below.

Lack of Visible Injuries Doesn't Mean You Don't Need Medical Care

Half of strangulation survivors will not have visible injuries. Just because a person doesn't have visible injuries doesn't mean the attack was less serious or dangerous. Survivors can still have serious internal injuries and long-term complications. See the sections below for more information and guidance:

[1] Glass N, Laughon K, Campbell J, Block CR, Hanson G, Sharps PW, Taliaferro E. Non-fatal strangulation is an important risk factor for homicide of women. J Emerg Med. 2008 Oct;35(3):329-35. doi: 10.1016/j.jemermed.2007.02.065. Epub 2007 Oct 25. PMID: 17961956; PMCID: PMC2573025. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2573025/

High Risk Signs and Symptoms of Strangulation*

*Some of these symptoms can show up immediately, days, weeks or months to years after the event.

Signs of Traumatic Brain Injury (Due to blockage of oxygen flow to the brain)

- Loss of consciousness such as gaps in memory, grogginess, or blacked out
- Dizziness or headaches
- Trouble focusing, confusion, disorientation
- Double vision
- Hearing loss or ears ringing (tinnitus)
- Loss of control of bladder or bowel so that you wet or soil yourself
- Seizure, which may present as
    - Restlessness, combativeness, aggressiveness
    - Shaking
- Stroke, which may present as
    - Facial weakness (numbness, decreased feeling)
    - Arm weakness
    - Difficulty speaking
    - Difficulty walking or impaired coordination

Signs of Airway Injury (Due to blockage or damage in windpipe)

- Difficulty breathing or swallowing
- Shortness of breath
- Voice changes, sore throat, or hoarse voice
- Neck or throat pain or swelling

Signs of Blood Vessel Injury (Due to high pressure on vessel causing it to burst or swell)

- Red dots on skin anywhere on body like face, tongue, head or behind ears (petechiae)
- Redness surrounding area of strangulation (vascular congestion)
- Marks around the neck made by a cord, rope or other item
- Neck or face swelling
- Blood in the whites of the eyes (subconjunctival hemorrhage)

If you are pregnant and have experienced strangulation, get medical care right away if you are experiencing any of these symptoms:

- Stomach pain
- Less movement from your baby
- Vaginal bleeding or spotting
- Cramping

Additional Signs, Symptoms and Complications of Strangulation

- Vomiting or spitting
- Scratches, abrasions, red marks, or thumb/finger/hand imprints
- Tongue swelling, bruising, or cuts
- Bruising on chest, face or neck
- Miscarriage, or fetal brain damage
- Fractures of the bones in the neck or body
- Depression, Anxiety or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression during pregnancy or within the first year after giving birth (Peripartum Depression)
- Forgetfulness, memory loss or dementia
- Difficulty concentrating or performing daily tasks
- Ongoing Headaches
- Tears on major vessels in the neck (vascular dissection)
- Blood clots
- Death

It is important to seek medical attention if you have been strangled. Strangulation can happen along with other types of assault, such as sexual assault, being shaken violently, or being hit hard on the head. These other injuries may cause different signs and symptoms that are important to watch for and talk about with your healthcare provider.

When to Seek Medical Care

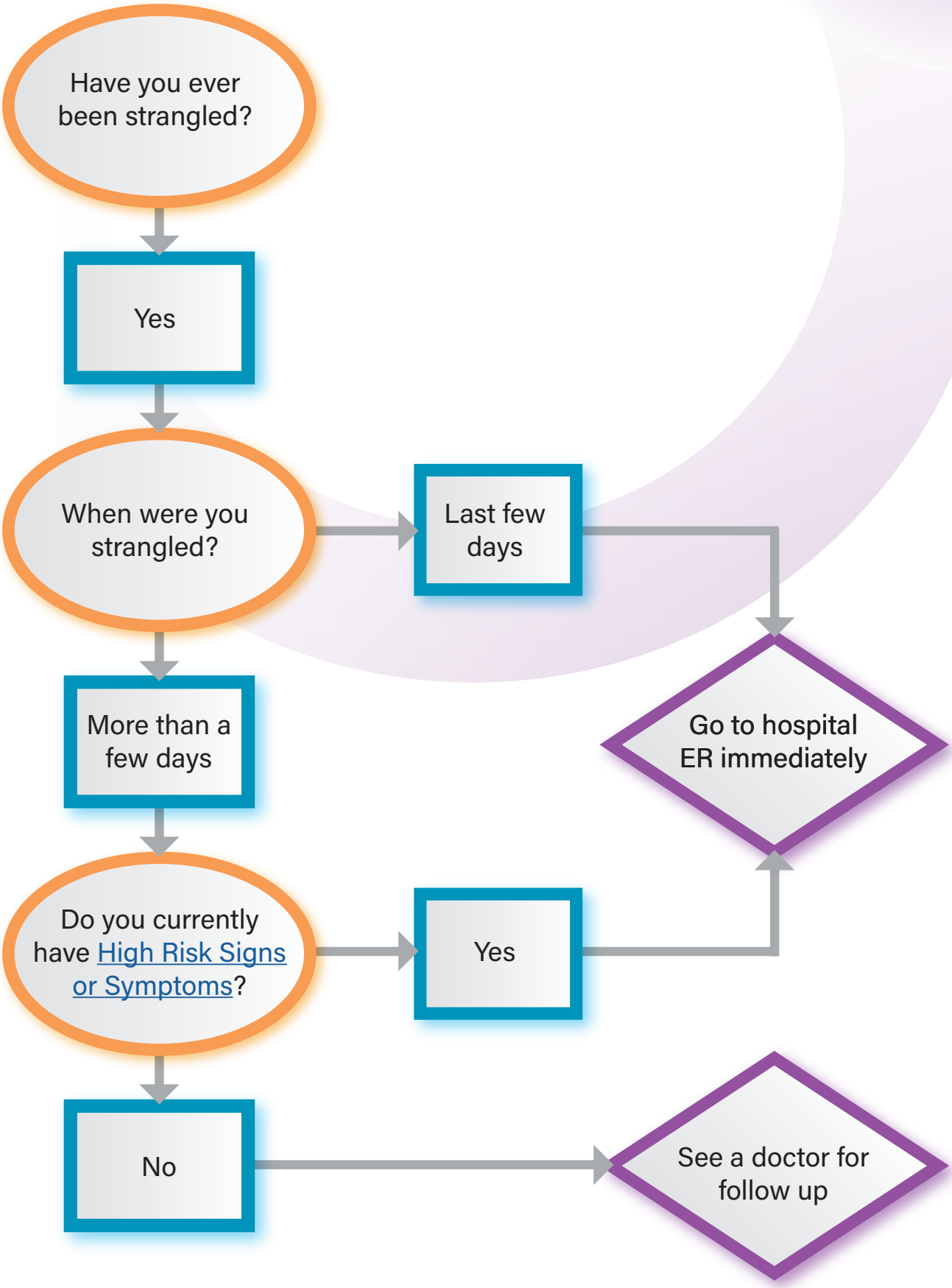
In the First Few Days

You should go to the nearest emergency department immediately if you have been strangled or are experiencing any high-risk symptoms listed above. Delaying medical care can result in permanent disability or even death. It's also important to know that some high-risk symptoms may not appear immediately—they can develop weeks or even months after the assault. If this happens, seek emergency care right away.

In the Following Weeks, Months or Years

If the strangulation happened some time ago and you are worried you may have some symptoms or complications from it, it is still important to seek medical evaluation. Consider contacting your doctor or visiting a clinic to be assessed and possibly referred to a specialist, such as a neurologist or a doctor who treats traumatic brain injuries. If you do not have a doctor, you can visit NYC Health + Hospitals (https://www.nychealthandhospitals.org/) to get connected with one. You will be seen and supported regardless of your immigration status or whether you have health insurance. For specialized and medical follow-up care, see the resource section below.

When to Seek Medical Care: Visual Guide



If Safe, Observe and Document

Even if you do not want to report this event to the police, you may decide to do so later.

If it is safe for you, write down symptoms and/or take pictures of any visible injuries each day until no longer visible.

If it is not safe for you to keep pictures or information on your phone/person, share symptoms and pictures with a trusted friend or family member and then delete this from your phone.

Signs and Symptoms of Strangulation: Visual Guide

Trigger Warning: Illustration of Physical Injuries on the Next Page.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRANGULATION

v2.26.19

Based on: Strangulation in Intimate Partner Violence, Chapter 16, Intimate Partner Violence. Oxford University Press, Inc. 2009.

NEUROLOGICAL

- Loss of Memory
- Loss of consciousness
- Behavioral changes
- Loss of sensation
- Extremity weakness
- Difficulty speaking
- Fainting
- Urination
- Defecation
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Headaches

SCALP

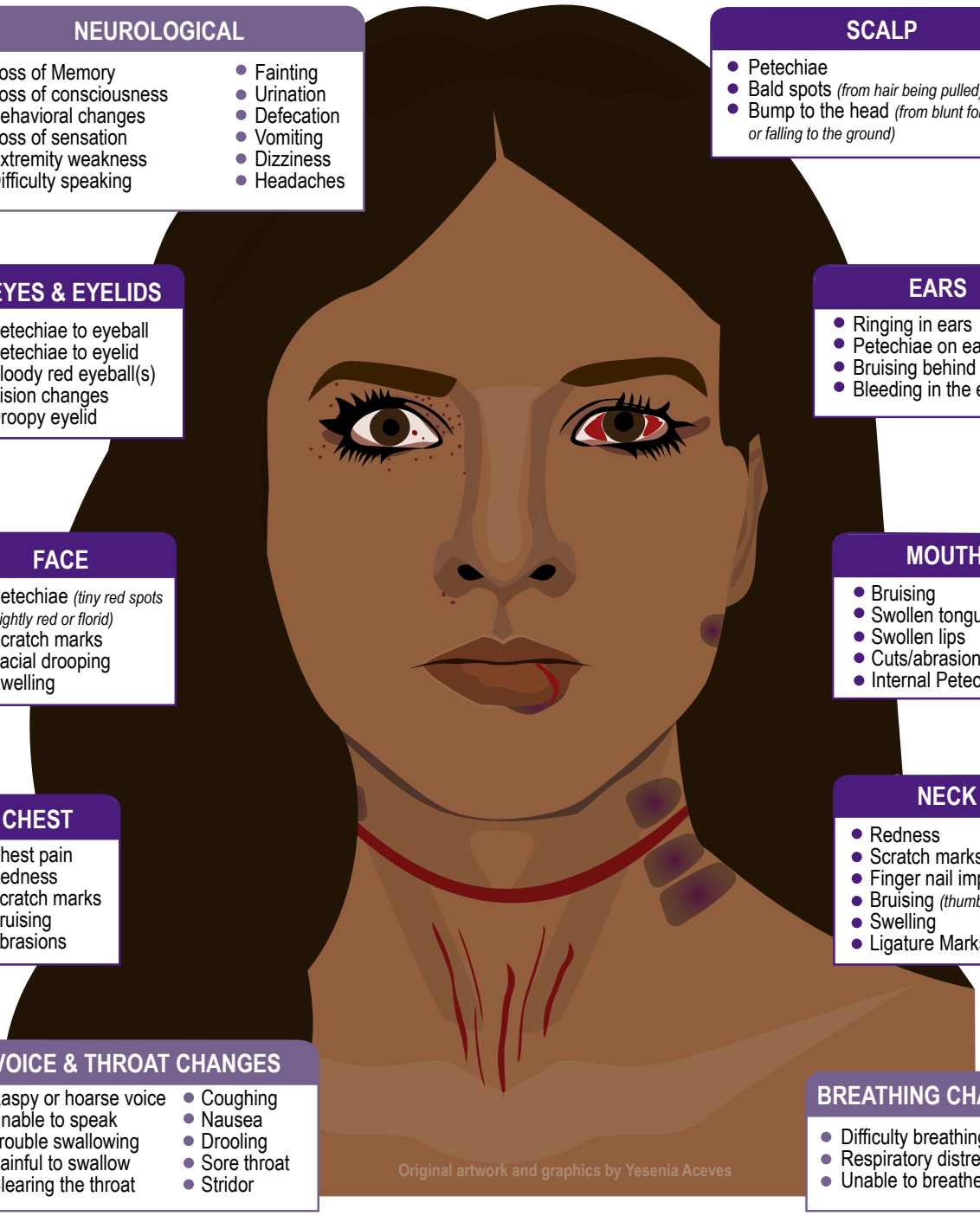
- Petechiae
- Bald spots *(from hair being pulled)*
- Bump to the head *(from blunt force trauma or falling to the ground)*

EYES & EYELIDS

- Petechiae to eyeball
- Petechiae to eyelid
- Bloody red eyeball(s)
- Vision changes
- Droopy eyelid

EARS

- Ringing in ears
- Petechiae on earlobe(s)
- Bruising behind the ear
- Bleeding in the ear



FACE

- Petechiae *(tiny red spots slightly red or florid)*
- Scratch marks
- Facial drooping
- Swelling

MOUTH

- Bruising
- Swollen tongue
- Swollen lips
- Cuts/abrasions
- Internal Petechiae

CHEST

- Chest pain
- Redness
- Scratch marks
- Bruising
- Abrasions

NECK

- Redness
- Scratch marks
- Finger nail impressions
- Bruising *(thumb or fingers)*
- Swelling
- Ligature Marks

VOICE & THROAT CHANGES

- Raspy or hoarse voice
- Unable to speak
- Trouble swallowing
- Painful to swallow
- Clearing the throat
- Coughing
- Nausea
- Drooling
- Sore throat
- Stridor

BREATHING CHANGES

- Difficulty breathing
- Respiratory distress
- Unable to breathe

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strangulationtraininginstitute.com

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Resources*

* If you are in immediate danger, need urgent help, or are experiencing life-threatening symptoms, call 911 right away.

Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Resources

NYC's 24-Hour Hope Hotline

- Connect with someone right away for assistance with safety planning, help finding a domestic violence shelter, and other support and resources — available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Call **1-800-621-HOPE (4673)** or **TTY: 866-604-5350**.

NYC Family Justice Centers (FJCs)

- **The FJCs** offer free, confidential help in a safe and caring space — no appointment needed.
- Services are available **in person and remotely** for everyone, no matter what your **immigration status, language, income, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or disability**.
- Each borough's FJC helps **survivors of domestic and gender-based violence** and their children connect to support and services.
- **All centers are open Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.** Survivors can call or visit anytime during those hours. For additional information, visit NYC Family Justice Centers (https://www.nyc.gov/content/nychope/pages/family-justice-centers).

Brooklyn FJC	Bronx FJC	Manhattan FJC
350 Jay Street, 14th Floor	**198 East 161st Street, 2nd Floor**	**80 Centre Street, 5th Floor**
(718) 250-5113	**(718) 508-1220**	**(212) 602-2800**

Queens FJC	Staten Island FJC
126-02 82nd Avenue	**126 Stuyvesant Place**
(718) 575-4545	**(718) 697-4300**

Resource Directory at NYC HOPE:

- **NYC HOPE** is the City's online directory for information and help related to gender-based violence
- It brings together resources and services from across New York City that survivors can search for and access from any computer, smartphone, tablet, or device with internet access.
- For additional information, visit NYC HOPE (https://www.nyc.gov/content/nychope/pages/).
- To access the resource directory visit NYC HOPE Service Finder (https://finder.nyc.gov/hopeservices/).

Medical and Mental Health Resources

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline:

- Call: **988**
- Text: **988**
- Chat online by visiting **988** (https://chat.988lifeline.org/)

For Specialized Gender-Based Violence & Strangulation Follow-Up Medical Care

Kings CARES

541 Clarkson Avenue, 9th Floor, Suite A (E Building)

Hours: Fridays, 9 AM – 12 PM

Kings CARES provides follow-up medical care for survivors of Gender-Based violence, including documenting injuries for safety or legal purposes and connecting people to specialty medical and legal support.

Open to all survivors, regardless of where they live, insurance, immigration status, or gender identity.

To learn if Kings CARES is right for you, call 929-310-1218 or email KingsCareReferrals@nychhc.org

For Medical Follow-up for Lingering Symptoms Due to Past Strangulation Experience(s)

Mount Sinai Brain Injury Research Center & Rehabilitation Neuropsychology Faculty Practice

5 East 98th Street, Basement Level (Room B-15)

New York, NY 10029

(212) 241-5152



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