Government of **Western Australia**
North Metropolitan Health Service

SARC SEXUAL ASSAULT RESOURCE CENTRE

Non-fatal strangulation

What is non-fatal strangulation?

Non-fatal strangulation (NFS) is when a person has survived having pressure applied over the neck. Some people call this 'choking'. This pressure might be applied by one or two hands, a forearm (chokehold), a knee, a foot, or by having something put around the neck and tightened, such as a belt, cord or any other item. NFS can occur once or many times by different methods. Each time is dangerous.

NFS is dangerous for your health

Pressure applied to the neck can stop oxygen getting to your brain. It may damage important blood vessels or the windpipe (airway). Lack of oxygen can damage your brain. Brain damage or even death may happen within minutes and can lead to lasting problems with memory and thinking clearly.

Blood vessels in the neck can be damaged, which can result in a stroke, sometimes immediately or days to weeks later.

The thyroid gland may be injured. Some people may experience ongoing problems with swallowing and speaking. NFS has now also been associated with miscarriages.

After experiencing NFS some people have mental health challenges, such as anxiety, depression and loneliness, feel scared, and need ongoing support. It is important to seek support from a general practitioner (GP), mental health professional or a support service. Mental health support lines are also available:

Mental Health Emergency Response Line (MHERL)

- Perth metro 1300 555 788
- Peel 1800 676 822
- Rural 1800 552 002

Lifeline 13 11 14

NFS is dangerous for your safety

Strangulation is one of the most lethal types of family and domestic violence (FDV) and is a form of power and control.

People who have been strangled by an intimate partner are at greater risk of other severe violence or even being killed by that partner.

Important information

Dial triple zero (000) for immediate medical attention or attend your nearest emergency department, if you:

- Have trouble breathing
- Notice any weakness on one side of your body
- Find it difficult to speak.

Breathing difficulties can be delayed for up to 36 hours. Make sure a responsible adult stays with you for the next one to two days.

Longer term medical and mental health issues can occur after NFS and should be discussed with your GP.

If you experienced NFS by your intimate partner you are at greater risk of severe violence or even

What can happen during or after NFS

During or after NFS people may report:

- Difficulty breathing
- Pain or difficulty swallowing
- Seeing spots or tunnel vision
- Ringing or buzzing in the ears
- Dizziness
- Loss of consciousness (blacking out)
- Loss of control of their bladder or bowel
- A change in their voice (husky voice or being unable to speak)
- Neck pain or tenderness
- Memory loss (gaps in time)
- Confusion
- Seizure-like activity
- Neurological symptoms, such as a stroke.

Injuries that might be seen after NFS

Sometimes people have injuries on their face, neck and body after an episode of NFS. Injuries can include:

- Bruises to the neck or behind the ears
- Scratches on the neck or under the chin
- Small red pinpoint spots on the face
- Ears, eyes, neck or chest may look flushed or 'sunburnt'
- Bloodshot eyes
- Bleeding into the whites of the eyes
- Swollen face, mouth and/or neck.

Some people may have no injuries.

NFS as part of consensual sexual activity

Some people experiment with strangulation during consensual sex. Pressure applied to the neck is always potentially dangerous and can be fatal. If someone asks to strangle you as part of sex, remember there is no safe way to strangle.

What to do if you have experienced NFS

You may feel there are other priorities rather than seeing a doctor and you may have other injuries which may seem more serious to you.

However, it is very important to see a doctor as soon as possible after you have experienced NFS, even if you have no injuries.

The doctor will be able to examine you and advise if any tests, such as a scan of your neck, are needed to make sure you have no internal injuries.

If you feel unsafe or at risk of further violence, you can contact any of the following agencies for advice and support:

- WA Police – Emergency (000) or Assistance (131 444)
- Crisis Care – Metro (08) 9223 1111; Country 1800 199 008
- Women's Domestic Violence Helpline – Metro (08) 9223 1188; Country 1800 007 339
- Local hospital emergency department
- Your GP
- 1800-RESPECT (1800-555-677)

CONSUMER REVIEWED

The information provided is for information purposes only. If you are a patient using this publication, you should seek assistance from a healthcare professional when interpreting these materials and applying them to your individual circumstances.

The Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC) is a free 24-hour emergency service providing medical and counselling services for people who have experienced a recent (within 14 days) sexual assault. Counselling for any sexual assault/abuse experienced recently or in the past is also available to people of all genders aged 13 years and above. Call SARC on (08) 6458 1828 or Freecall 1800 199 888.

WA Police Sex Assault Squad. To report a sexual assault call the Sex Assault Squad on (08) 9428 1600. Visit your local police station or call police on 131 444

Victim Support Service: A free service available at all courts in WA to support victims of crime. Call **9425 2850** or **1800 818 988**. Refer to the website for further information.

Search online for these services to find out more.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request.

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