

Guide to safer restraint

Positional (or restraint) asphyxia

What is positional asphyxia?

This refers to a situation in which a person is not able to breathe properly because of the way that they are being physically restrained. This could be because they can't expand their lungs to breathe due to pressure on their chest, diaphragm, or back. It could also be because their airway is blocked or impeded, perhaps due to vomiting or pressure on their neck.

Typical positions that can lead to this include any restraint causing:

- restriction/pressure of the chest wall
- impairment of the diaphragm (which may be caused by the abdomen being compressed in a prone, seated or kneeling position)
- pressure to the area of the neck



Warning signs include

- inability or difficulty in breathing
- a sudden increase, or decrease, in resistance
- complaining of difficulty breathing
- feeling sick or being sick
- becoming limp, unresponsive, or apparently unconscious
- respiratory or cardiac arrest
- swelling around the face and neck and a blue colour especially around lips
- small blood spots appearing on the head, neck and chest areas
- noticeable expansion of the veins in the neck



Check vital signs using A-B-C

If you have someone under restraint, you should always monitor their vital signs using the ABC method:

- **Airway** – make sure their airway is not obstructed
- **Breathing** – check that the person is breathing normally
- **Circulation** – check that you can detect heartbeat and pulse

Continuously communicate with the person restrained to help calm and reassure them, and ensure they can talk easily and are OK. De-escalate the restraint and use of force at the earliest opportunity.



Things to avoid

- don't restrain a person on the ground in a way that might affect their ability to breathe. In particular, don't apply weight or pressure to a person's back while they are lying on the ground
- don't restrain a person leaning forward in a sitting position, as this can obstruct their airway
- don't restrain a person by bending them forward from the waist and keeping them in that position, as this restricts the diaphragm and ability to breathe
- don't put weight on a person's chest, back or stomach, as this causes stress to the muscles used in breathing, and prevents the normal movement of the diaphragm and ribcage.

What to do if you suspect asphyxiation

Treat as a medical emergency:

- immediately release the restraint to allow the person to breathe
- call for urgent medical assistance
- provide appropriate first aid/CPR

The information above is based on the *Positional (or Restraint) Asphyxia Factsheet*, written by Eric Baskind and produced by the British Self Defence Governing Body www.bsdbg.co.uk/