



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STRANGULATION

SAN DIEGO COUNTY HEALTH CARES

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IS IT IMPORTANT TO IDENTIFY NONFATAL STRANGULATION?



True or False?

*Non-fatal strangulation of an intimate partner is associated with an increased in risk of future **homicide**.*



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NONFATAL STRANGULATION AND HOMICIDE

TRUE

One of the most lethal forms of domestic violence and sexual assault

Associated with a

- SIX-fold increased risk of attempted homicide
- SEVEN-fold increased risk of completed homicide (some sources say 8x)



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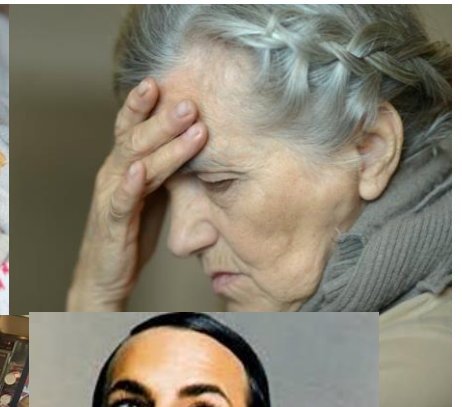
STRANGULATION WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION!

Affects all ages

All races

All genders

All sexual orientations



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STRANGULATION DEFINITION

Strangulation is a form of **asphyxia*** characterized by closure of blood vessels and/or air passages of the neck as the result of ***external pressure on the neck***

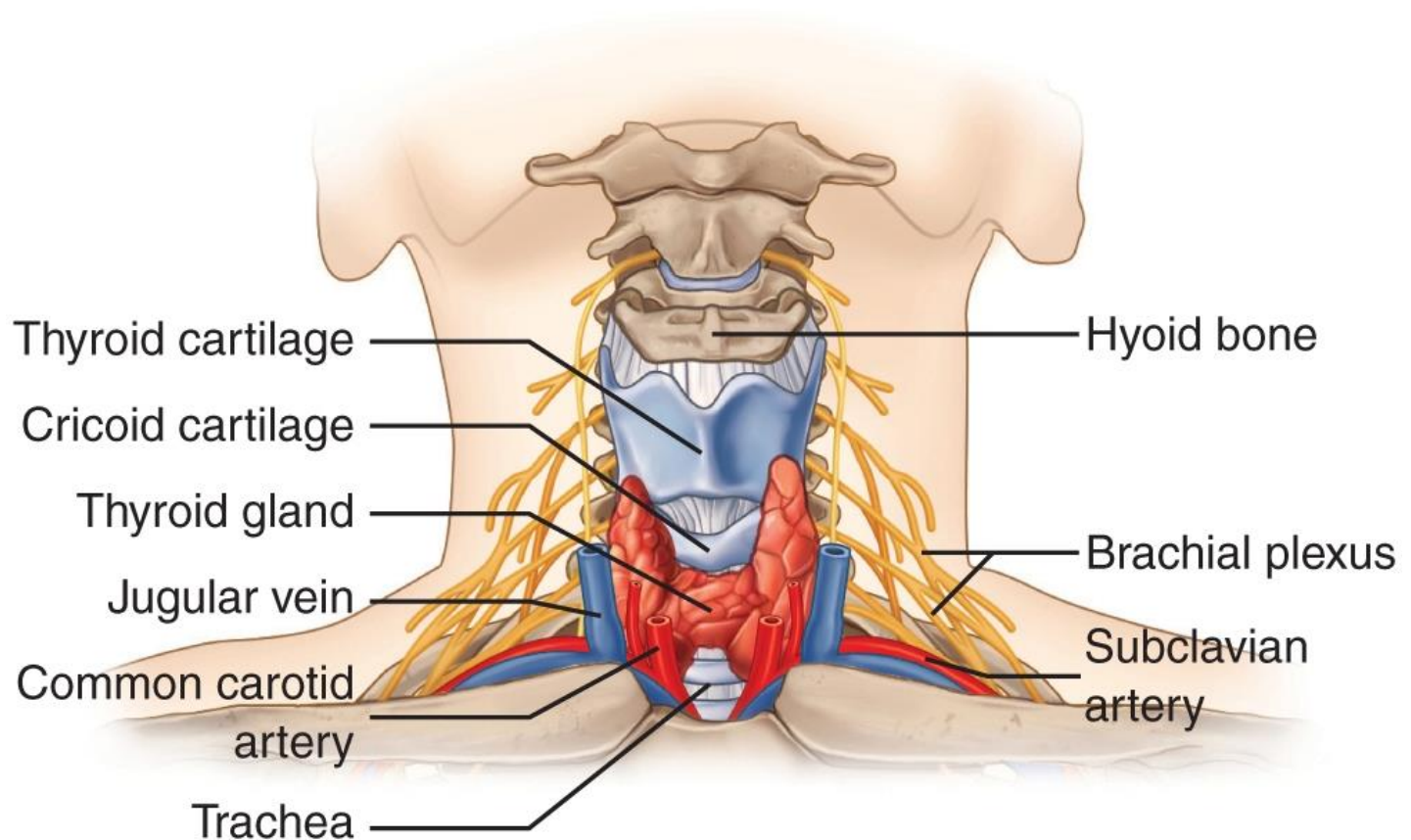


***Asphyxia** = a condition arising when the body is deprived of oxygen, causing unconsciousness or death; suffocation



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ANATOMY OF NECK



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STRANGULATION VS. MECHANICAL ASPHYXIA

Strangulation

- External pressure to the neck that causes restriction or complete closure of blood vessels and/or airway, resulting in asphyxia
 - Manual
 - Ligature
 - Hanging
- Fatal vs. Non-Fatal



Mechanical Asphyxia

- A weight is placed on the torso or chest area, restricting breathing
- Examples: knee, sitting on or placing a heavy object on a person



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STRANGULATION VS. CHOKING

Strangulation is not “choking”

- Choking involves INTERNAL airway obstruction rather than an external force applied to the neck



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STRANGULATION PRESSURE COMPARISON



60-80 psi (pounds of force per square inch)



20 psi



Pressure needed to block
carotid arteries/veins ~

4.4 to 20 psi



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STRANGULATION IS SERIOUS!

Only 4 pounds of external pressure required to occlude jugular veins

Only 5 to 11 pounds of pressure required to occlude carotid arteries

Unconsciousness can occur *within seconds*

Death can occur *within 3 to 5 minutes*



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UNCONSCIOUSNESS WITHIN SECONDS



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STRANGULATION SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Symptoms

Involuntary urination/defecation

Difficulty speaking

Trouble swallowing

Ringing in ears

Difficulty breathing

Signs

Bruising (may be delayed)

Eye findings

Facial droop

Hoarse voice

Swollen tongue

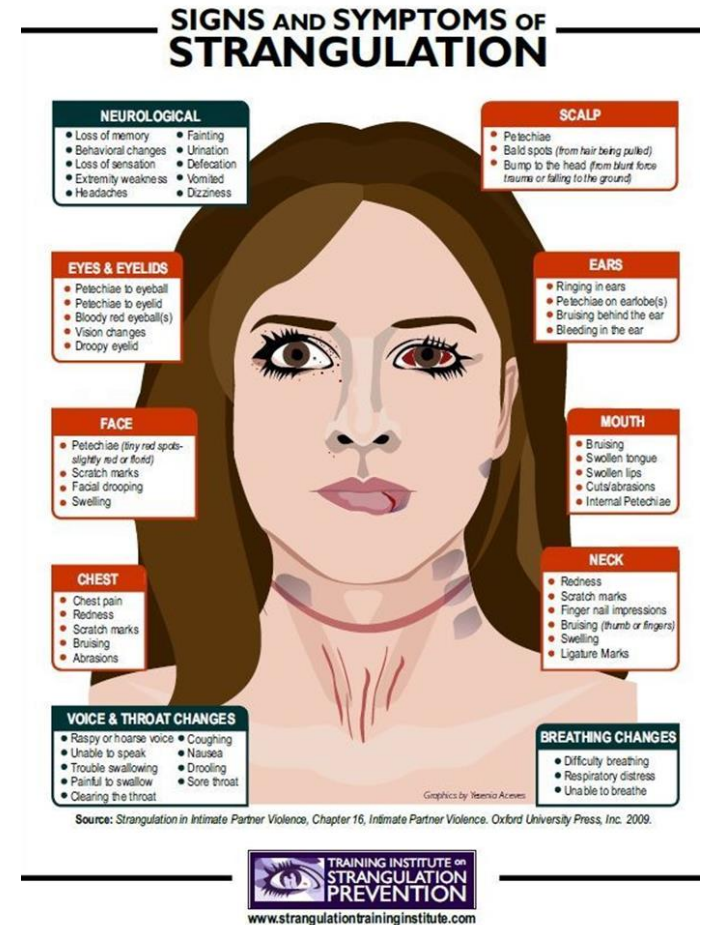
Pulmonary edema



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Recognizing strangulation signs and symptoms during medical examinations can save lives!

However, **>50% of victims** have
NO EXTERNAL SIGNS

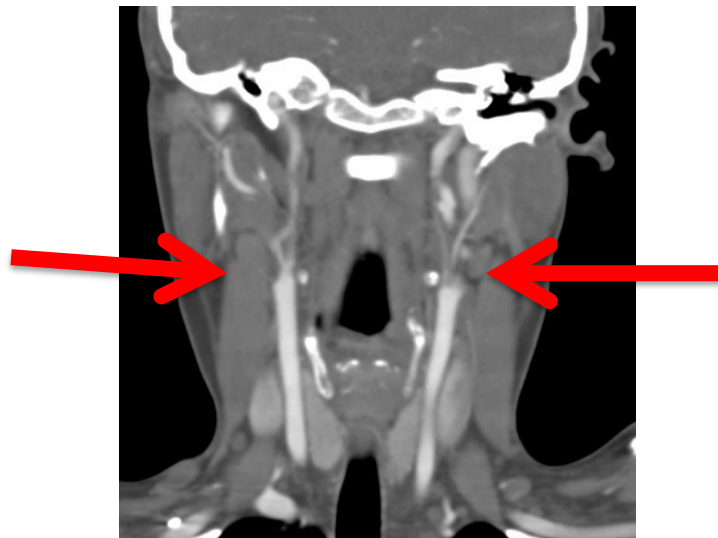


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BILATERAL CAROTID DISSECTIONS

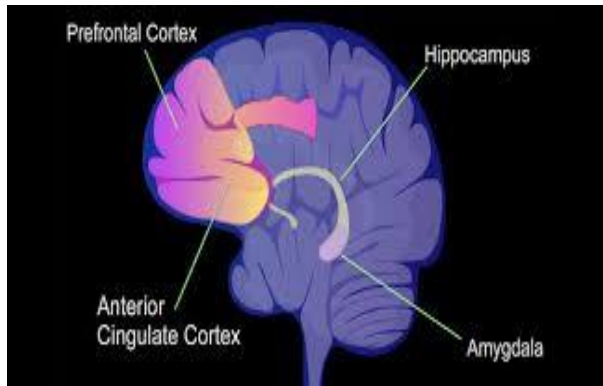
SIX DAYS AFTER STRANGULATION ASSAULT

May have NO externally visible injury, but can have significant symptoms, and become fatal **days after an event**



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SYMPTOMS OF ASPHYXIA OR HYPOXIA INCLUDE BEHAVIORAL CHANGES



Hippocampus critical for forming/organizing/storing memory

Very sensitive to lack of oxygen

If no blood flow, the brain is NOT working

No blood flow = no memory

No memory means damaged hippocampus

“Fight or Flight”

- Early
 - Restlessness and violence
 - Hostile (“she woke up fighting”)
- Long term
 - Psychosis
 - Amnesia
 - Personality changes
 - Progressive dementia



SHORT & LONG-TERM HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

- . Hypertension
- . Chronic Pain
- . Heart Disease
- . Traumatic Brain Injury
- . Stroke
- . Anxiety/Depression
- . Substance Use
- . Miscarriage



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SAN DIEGO COUNTY HEALTH CARES INITIATIVE

*IMPROVING PREVENTION AND RESPONSE PRACTICES FOR
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND STRANGULATION*

Kurt Mechals, Chief of Family Protection,
San Diego County District Attorney's Office



A woman with curly hair is sitting down, looking distressed with her hand on her head. A professional is sitting next to her, taking notes on a clipboard. The background is a simple, light-colored wall.

WHY IMPORTANT?

- ✦ There are approximately 17,000 domestic violence (DV) incidents reported to law enforcement in our county each year (SANDAG).
- ✦ DV can have short and long-term impacts on:
 - Physical health such as hypertension, chronic pain, headaches, heart disease, miscarriage, and stroke.
 - Behavioral health such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, and substance misuse.

A doctor in a white coat and stethoscope is examining a patient's neck. The patient is a woman with dark hair tied back. The background is a clinical setting with bookshelves.

WHY IMPORTANT?

- Non-fatal strangulation is a strong indicator of future lethality in intimate partner relationships.

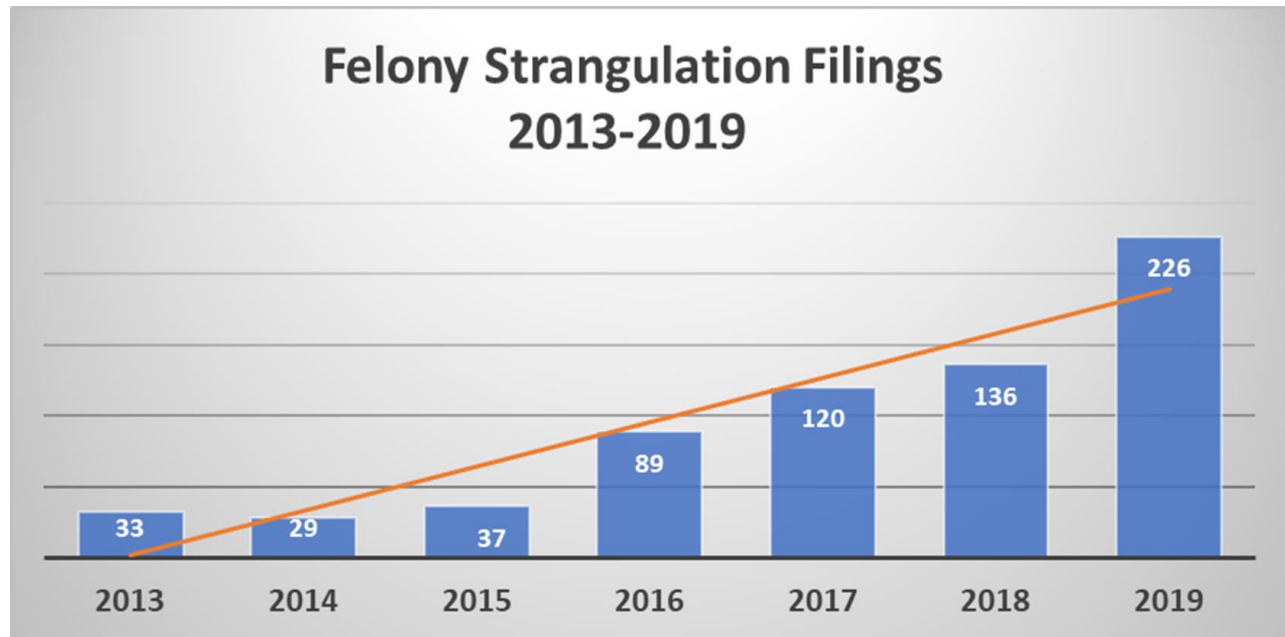
- Healthcare staff have an important role in screening for intimate partner violence (IPV) and strangulation.

- Referral for a Domestic Assault Forensic Examination (DAFE) can make a difference in the investigation and prosecution of these crimes.

- 13% of domestic violence homicides in our county in the past 22 years were the result of strangulation.

BACKGROUND

- Feb 2017, our county's first Strangulation Protocol and documentation form was approved by the Chiefs/Sheriff/DA/CA for law enforcement and prosecution.
- Training for sworn personnel followed.
- A grant funded Domestic Violence Assault Forensic Exam program was launched.
- Significant outcomes:



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PASSING THE TORCH

FROM CRIMINAL JUSTICE TO HEALTH CARE



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WHAT IS THE HEALTH CARES INITIATIVE?

TOOLS & TRAINING FOR
HEALTHCARE STAFF

*UNIVERSAL SCREENING
FOR INTIMATE PARTNER
ABUSE
*STRANGULATION
ASSESSMENT

*FURTHER EVALUATION & REFERRALS FOR
FORENSIC EXAMS
*SUSPICIOUS INJURY REPORTING
*PATIENT SAFETY PLANNING
*CONNECTIONS TO RESOURCES



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- C** **Conduct Screening** for current and former intimate partner abuse
- A** **Assess** for signs and symptoms of strangulation
- R** **Report** suspicious injuries to law enforcement
- E** **Evaluate** patient (evidence collection by a Forensic Examiner)
- S** **Safety Plan** and connect patient to resources



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HEALTH CARE ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

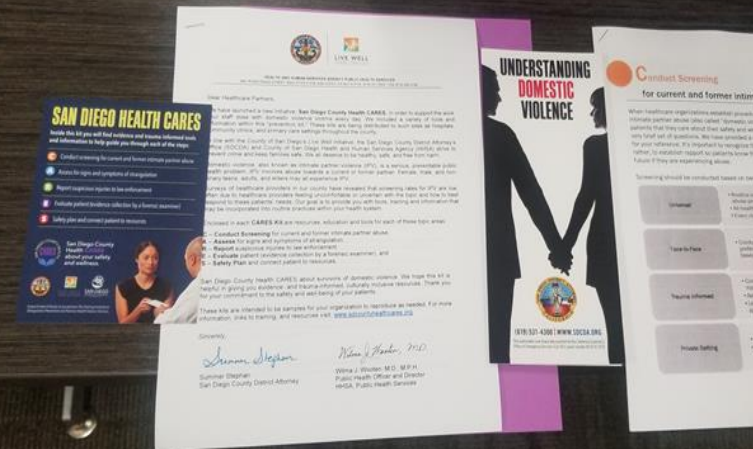
Talk to
us today



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HEALTH CARE ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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ONLY YOU DECIDE WHAT GOES ON YOUR NECK

TALK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER TODAY IF SOMEONE HAS PUT THEIR HANDS OR AN OBJECT AROUND YOUR NECK



San Diego County
Health CARES
about your safety
and wellness.

National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-888-799-7233 (24 Hour/Confidential)
WWW.THEHOTLINE.ORG

2-1-1 San Diego
(24 Hour/Confidential)
WWW.211.ORG



SU SALUD INVOLUCRA DE LO QUE SE PUEDE

HABLE CON SU PROVEEDOR DE SERVICIOS DE SALUD
ACTUAL O ANTERIOR LA/LO ESTÁ LASTIMANDO. HAY AYUDA

¿Sabías esto?

- La violencia doméstica puede ponerlo/a en mayor riesgo de tener resultados negativos de salud alta, aborto espontáneo y problemas de salud mental / uso de sustancias.
- Los episodios repetidos de violencia doméstica que resultan en una lesión cerebral traumática, síntomas graves de salud.
- El estrangulamiento de una pareja a menudo no deja lesiones visibles.
- La exposición a la violencia doméstica puede afectar a sus hijos emocionalmente, físicamente, cognitivamente.



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- October 2019
 - Press Conference
 - Training Launch for “champions” to 60+ healthcare sites
- Distribution of 500 toolkits to healthcare providers
- Awareness campaign: 27,000 wallet cards and brochures in multiple languages and 9,000 posters
- Website
- 6 Week Webinar series on CARES topics (Feb 2020)
- Onsite training and technical assistance at each major healthcare organization (March 2020-June 2021)



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WHAT CAN *YOU* DO TO SUPPORT THIS INITIATIVE?

- Ensure all BHS providers have received at least basic training on domestic violence (e.g. DV Essentials one day training is offered by the SDDVC at no cost. Visit www.sddvc.org)
- Conduct “universal screening” for current and former DV at all behavioral health programs
 - Follow best practices for screening and response for DV
 - Include a screening question on whether a “hand or object” have been placed on or around the person’s neck.
 - If “yes,” refer the person to the DAFE program at Palomar Health Forensic Services.
- Provide support and connection to resources.



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