



Helping in choking and breathing emergencies

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It is foreseeable that a hotel guest will become injured or may require immediate medical attention at some point. Probably no emergency requires more immediate response than incidents where a victim has stopped breathing or has suffered sudden cardiac arrest (a heart attack).

In either of these situations, a victim may require assistance from others because of their inability to breathe. Oxygen is vital for our bodies to survive. As we breathe in air or oxygen it is transferred to our lungs and pumped to our brain. When oxygen doesn't enter the body, it becomes a life threatening situation. As a result, the brain will rapidly become deprived of air and a victim will likely die or suffer dramatic brain injury unless help is rendered immediately.

In just two minutes the brain will start to incur irreversible injurious effects if it is deprived of air. Death can occur as soon as four minutes without oxygen. The two most likely scenarios where this could happen in a hotel is near the swimming pool (e.g., drowning) or a food and beverage venues (e.g., choking on food or liquids). If this happens, always immediately call "911" or another emergency number, and then commence to care for the life-threatening conditions.

Ideally, every workplace should have someone trained in first aid and CPR on duty at all times. However, this will take some planning to accomplish this task. In the meantime, there are some tips that can be used to help, if an emergency should arise. Remember, you only have a minute to respond and it is extremely unlikely that emergency workers can arrive in such a short time frame after being notified. So you must act right away.



Choking situations

For adults, most choking situations will occur as a result of the ingestion of food or beverage.

Children may choke on food, beverage or other items placed in the mouth (i.e., toy parts). The item forms a blockage in the esophagus of the victim preventing them from inhaling in order to draw additional air into the lungs.

Determining if a person is choking is not difficult. The universal symbol for choking is when a person grabs their throat with one or both hands. This is a natural reflex of choking victims and easy to ascertain. Also, the victim may not be able to speak or begin thrashing about or become unexpectedly disruptive trying to notify bystanders of their inability to breathe. If their face turns blue or purple this is a sure sign of lack of oxygen (cyanosis).

If they can't talk, cough or breathe, you will need to remove the object from their throat by giving quick, hard back slaps and then abdominal thrusts. This is known as the Heimlich Maneuver. Don't do the back slaps or abdominal thrusts if they can talk or are coughing; this means that they are still able to draw air into the lungs.

How to perform back slaps and the Heimlich Maneuver

Encourage the victim to cough first, slapping the upper back with the heel of your hand with measured hard blows (5 to 20 times) - children with more care. The back slap essentially will create a pressure that will often help to expel the blockage. If this is unsuccessful in dislodging the blockage, administer abdominal thrusts.

Abdominal thrusts used in the Heimlich Maneuver can cause cracked ribs and bruising if not properly applied to the right area. The person performing the procedure should stand behind the one who is choking and wrap their arms around the victim's waist. Make a fist and place thumb side against the victim's upper abdomen; this is below the ribcage and above the navel. Grasp your fist with your other hand and press into their upper abdomen with a quick inward and upward thrust. Do not squeeze the ribcage; confine the force of the thrust to your hands. Repeat this procedure until the object is expelled. For pregnant women or obese people chest thrusts can be used in a modified form by placing the back of the hand on the chest rather than the abdomen.

Rescue breathing

In some emergency situations, you will find an unconscious victim. First perform a visual check of the area. Is it safe to approach the unconscious individual? Are there hazardous energy sources or atmosphere present that may harm you? If there are hazardous situations, those must be dealt with before approaching the individual.

You should check to see if the person is breathing. To do this, put your head near the person's mouth and nose. Look, listen, and feel for breathing for about five seconds. At the same time, watch to see if the chest rises and falls. If the person is not on his back, carefully roll him while supporting the head and neck. You will have to give rescue breathing if the person is not breathing. This may keep the person alive until medical help arrives. If the person is not breathing and does not have a pulse, find someone who can perform CPR if you do not know how.

To perform rescue breathing, tilt the person's head back and lift the chin. Then pinch and shut the nose. Place your mouth on theirs, form a tight seal. If a face shield or gloves are available, use them to protect yourself from body fluids. Blow two (2) slow breaths of air into their mouth. Breathe into the person until the chest gently rises. Remove your mouth and allow the air to exhale from the lungs. Then check for a pulse at the carotid artery at the neck. Continue rescue breathing as long as necessary.

If a pulse is present but the person is still not breathing, continue rescue breathing. Blow one slow breath of air into his mouth every five seconds. Continue this for about one (1) minute at a rate of 12 breaths every minute. After one minute, check to see if the person is breathing on their own. If not, continue rescue breathing at the rate of 12 breaths per minute. Remember to stop rescue breathing if the scene becomes unsafe, if you can see or feel signs of the victim breathing, or if you are too exhausted to continue.

Performing emergency breathing Do's and Don'ts

- **DO** know that oxygen is vital to life and must enter through the lungs.
- **DO** remember in an emergency situation to call for help in a life threatening emergency.
- **DO** perform rescue breathing if a person is not breathing.
- **DON'T** hesitate to help someone in an emergency situation.
- **DON'T** forget to call 911 or an emergency number for medical assistance.
- **DON'T** give abdominal thrusts to someone who is talking or coughing.

Acting quickly and calmly may help to save the life of a guest or co-worker. Do not hesitate to respond and offer aid if you know how to properly respond. Every state's Good Samaritan Statute affords some level of protection to non-professional first responders who attempt to aid those in need in an emergency situation. These laws are explained more fully in the accompanying article. But remember, at a minimum, always call 911 or your local emergency telephone number. ✧

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