

What to do during emergencies?

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Topic overview



You may have seen a person suffering from a sudden illness on the job, at home or in the community. If that happens, besides calling "999", would you know what kind of assistance you can give to preserve his/her life, or at least prevent the condition from becoming worse until he/she sees a healthcare provider? This article will provide you with a better understanding of what you can do during emergencies.

High blood pressure crisis



A high blood pressure crisis (or hypertensive crisis) happens when the blood pressure goes out of control by rapidly rising over 180/120 mmHg within a short duration. This may damage the blood vessels all over the body and affect many systems, leading to severe consequences.

Symptoms



A high blood pressure crisis is usually asymptomatic; however, if symptoms do occur, they may include:

- Light-headedness
- Vertigo and dizziness
- Severe headache
- Severe chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea and vomiting
- Ringing or buzzing in the ears
- Fainting episodes
- Seizures
- Severe anxiety
- Loss of consciousness



How you can help

- Reassure the patient and call for medical help
- Allow the patient to lie down and rest adequately
- Try to comfort and reduce anxiety
- Keep monitoring the breathing, pulse rate, blood pressure, level of consciousness and for any other dangerous signs
- Do not allow the patient to walk about, accompany him/her if necessary. Watch out for falls
- If the patient is vomiting or having seizures, turn him/her sideways to prevent accidental sucking of food particles or fluid into the lungs
- If the patient complains of difficulty in breathing, prop him/her up using pillows behind the upper back
- Do not give anything by mouth to eat/drink if there is suspicion of a stroke
- Avoid caffeine- or alcohol-containing beverages
- Look for the possible cause for a hypertensive crisis (eg, missing doses of blood pressure medication or stroke). If the patient is a known hypertensive and has missed his/her medication, consult doctor over the phone and give a dose of medications if instructed
- Perform mouth-to-mouth breathing (cardiopulmonary resuscitation [CPR]) if breathing is unsatisfactory

Diabetes: Hypoglycaemia



Despite a well-controlled blood glucose in an individual with diabetes, there are times when his/her sugar levels may drop below normal levels. This condition is known as hypoglycaemia. If this happens, he/she will need an urgent first aid. If this happens, he/she will need an urgent first aid.

Symptoms



- Extreme tiredness
- Loss of concentration
- Severe thirst
- Abdominal pain
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness and loss of coordination
- Erratic or argumentative behaviour
- Losing consciousness rapidly
- Persistent headache
- Pale or sweaty skin



How you can help

- **If unconscious:** Place the patient in the recovery position (**Figure**) and call for an ambulance. Do not give him/her anything to eat or drink.
- **If conscious:** Give the patient a sweetened drink, chocolate or glucose sweets to suck. When the patient is more alert, you can offer a more substantial carbohydrate meal (eg, a sandwich or several sweet biscuits) and advise him/her to obtain medical advice.

DO NOT try to give the patient a dose of insulin because this can be dangerous!

Figure: Placing a person lying on their back in the recovery position during emergencies³



- (A) Ensure that you kneel down next to the person on the floor
- (B) Place the arm nearest to you at a right angle to the person's body, with his/her palm facing upwards
- (C) Take the other arm and place it across the person's chest so the back of the hand is against his/her cheek nearest you, and hold it there



- (D) Lift the person's far knee with your other hand and pull it up until his/her foot is flat on the floor. Carefully pull on the bent knee and roll towards you



- (E) Open the person's airway by gently tilting his/her head back and lifting the chin



- (F) The person should now be in a position with arm supporting his/her head and bent leg on the floor, with an opened airway

Stroke



A stroke occurs when the blood flow to an area of the brain is cut off, as a result from a clot in a blood vessel that stops blood from passing through to the brain tissue.

Symptoms



- Tingling, weakness or numbness down one side of the body
- Loss of muscle tone of the face muscles, with dribbling from one side
- Blurred or double vision
- Nausea
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Loss of speech or the uttering of meaningless sounds
- Loss of balance and coordination
- Deteriorating conscious state or unconsciousness
- Headache

The acronym **FAST** can also be used to help you identify someone who is experiencing a stroke



How you can help

- **If partly or fully unconscious and breathing normally:** Place the patient in the recovery position (**Figure**) and call for an ambulance immediately
- **If conscious:** Place the patient into the position of greatest comfort and cover him/her to reduce heat loss

Stay with the patient and observe closely for any change in condition until the ambulance arrives

Figure: Placing a person lying on their back in the recovery position during emergencies³



- (A) Ensure that you kneel down next to the person on the floor
- (B) Place the arm nearest to you at a right angle to the person's body, with his/her palm facing upwards
- (C) Take the other arm and place it across the person's chest so the back of the hand is against his/her cheek nearest you, and hold it there



- (D) Lift the person's far knee with your other hand and pull it up until his/her foot is flat on the floor. Carefully pull on the bent knee and roll towards you



- (E) Open the person's airway by gently tilting his/her head back and lifting the chin



- (F) The person should now be in a position with arm supporting his/her head and bent leg on the floor, with an opened airway

Heart attack

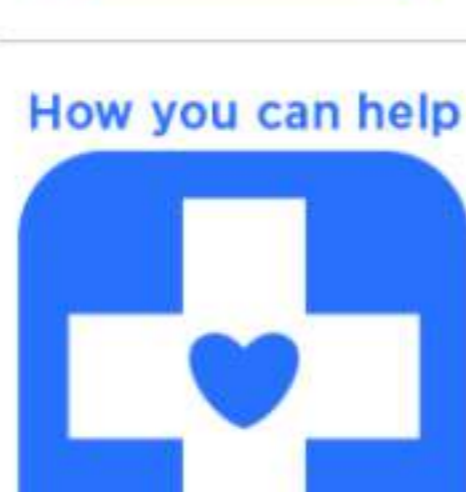


A heart attack occurs when the blood flow that carries oxygen to the heart is blocked. As a result, the heart muscle starves from oxygen and begins to die.

Symptoms



- Changes in mental status, especially drowsy
- Chest pain that feels like heavy pressure, squeezing or fullness (usually in the centre of the chest; may also be felt in the jaw, shoulder, arms, back and stomach; can last for more than a few minutes or come and go)
- Cold sweat
- Light-headedness
- Nausea
- Numbness, aching or tingling in the arm
- Shortness of breath
- Weakness or fatigue



How you can help

- Let the patient sit down, rest and try to keep calm
- Loosen any tight clothing
- Ask if the patient takes any chest pain medication and help him/her take it
- Call for an ambulance if the pain does not go away promptly with rest, after taking medicine or if he/she is unconscious and unresponsive
- Begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) if necessary

References

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