First aid basics and DRSABCD
DrSABCD stands for:

- **Danger** – always check the danger to you, any bystanders and then the injured or ill person. Make sure you do not put yourself in danger when going to the assistance of another person.
- **Response** – is the person conscious? Do they respond when you talk to them, touch their hands or squeeze their shoulder?
- **Send for help** – call triple zero (000). Don’t forget to answer the questions asked by the operator.
- **Airway** – Is the person’s airway clear? Is the person breathing?
- **If** the person is responding, they are conscious and their airway is clear, assess how you can help them with any injury.
- **If** the person is not responding and they are unconscious, you need to check their airway by opening their mouth and having a look inside. There is usually clear, tilt their head gently back (by lifting their chin) and check for breathing. If the mouth is not clear, place the person on their side, open their mouth and check the contents, then tilt the head back and check for breathing.
- **Breathing** – check for breathing by looking for chest movements (up and down). Listen by putting your ear near to their mouth and nose. Feel for breathing by putting your hand on the lower part of their chest. If the person is unconscious but breathing, turn them onto their side, carefully ensuring that you keep their head, neck and spine in alignment. Monitor their breathing until you hand over to the ambulance officers.
- **CPR** (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) – if an adult is unconscious and not breathing, make sure they are flat on their back and then place the heel of one hand in the centre of their chest and your other hand on top. Press down firmly and smoothly (compressing to one third of their chest depth) 30 times. Give two breaths. To get the breath in, tilt their head back gently by lifting their chin. Pinch their nostrils closed, place your open mouth firmly over their open mouth and blow firmly into their mouth. Keep going with the 30 compressions and two breaths at the speed of approximately five repeats in two minutes until you hand over to the ambulance officers or another trained person, or until the person you are resuscitating responds. The method for CPR for children under eight and babies is very similar and you can learn these skills in a CPR course.
- **Defibrillator** – for unconscious adults who are not breathing, apply an automated external defibrillator (AED) if one is available. They are available in many public places, clubs and organisations. An AED is a machine that delivers an electrical shock to cancel any irregular heart beat (arrhythmia), in an effort get the normal heart beating to re-establish itself. The devices are very simple to operate. Just follow the instructions and pictures on the machine, and on the package of the pads, as well as the voice prompts. If the person responds to defibrillation, turn them onto their side and tilt their head to maintain their airway. Some AEDs may not be suitable for children.

Where to learn first aid and CPR

You can attend a CPR training course or first aid course with a non-profit organisation such as St John Ambulance Australia (Victoria), Australian Red Cross and Life Saving Victoria. St John also runs awareness programs in schools and the community.

There is no age limit to learning CPR. The ability to carry out CPR is only limited by the physical capabilities of the person carrying out the procedure.

In some schools, CPR is a module of the first aid course taught to Year 9 students. CPR is a life skill that everyone should learn. Remember that doing some CPR in an emergency is better than doing nothing.

Infection control when performing CPR

To avoid contact with potentially infectious bodily fluids such as blood or saliva, everyone with training in resuscitation is advised to carry a resuscitation mask in their purse, wallet or first aid kit. This helps to take the worry of infection out of helping someone in a life-threatening situation. These masks are available from first aid providers or from your pharmacy.

First aid for a person choking

Maintaining a clear airway is always the priority to make sure the person can keep breathing. You might need to roll them onto their side, but spinal injury is always a
possibility in anyone involved in an accident. There are ways of placing an injured person on their side so that there is very little movement to their spine. You can learn these skills in a first aid course.

**First aid for a medication or drug overdose**

Medications are very unpredictable. Many medications or illicit drugs have dangerous side effects, particularly if they are mixed together or taken with alcohol.

If you are aware or suspect that someone you have found has overdosed on drugs or medications, do not leave them to ‘sleep it off’. A doctor or ambulance paramedic should assess any person who overdoses on any medication.

It is very important that you call triple zero (000) if you are aware or suspect that someone you have found has overdosed on drugs or medications, as many overdoses cause death.

**First aid kit**

As well as knowing some basic first aid techniques, it is important that households and workplaces have a first aid kit that meets their needs and is well organised, fully stocked and readily available at all times.

The contents should be appropriate to cope with a range of emergency situations, depending on the setting. It’s a good idea to have a number of kits handy in different places, such as in the home, car or office.

First aid kits are available for purchase from a variety of providers, including St John Ambulance Australia (Victoria) or your local pharmacy. Specialty kits are also available to meet specific needs.

**Reducing the risk of infected wounds during first aid**

Open wounds are prone to infection. Suggestions to reduce the risk of infection include:

- Wash your hands if possible before managing the wound. You could also use an antibacterial hand sanitiser.
- Put on the disposable gloves provided in your first aid kit.
- Try to avoid breathing or coughing over the wound.
- Cleaning of the wound depends on the type and severity of the wound, including the severity of the bleeding. You may just clean around the wound.
- Cover the wound with a sterile dressing. Try not to touch the dressing’s surface before applying it to the wound.
- Seek medical advice or call triple zero (000) for an ambulance.

In an emergency, these suggestions may not be practical. If the injured person is bleeding heavily, don’t waste time. For example, cleaning the wound might dislodge a blood clot and make the wound bleed again or bleed more.

Immediately apply pressure to a heavily bleeding wound (or around the wound if there is an embedded object), and apply a bandage when the bleeding has slowed down or stopped. Call triple zero (000) immediately.

**Using bandages during first aid**

This information is of a general nature only and should not be considered a replacement for proper first aid training.

General suggestions include:

- The injured person should be sitting or lying down. Position yourself in front of the person on their injured side.
- Make sure their injured body part is supported in position before you start to bandage it.
- If the injured person can help by holding the padding in place, wrap the ‘tail’ of the bandage one full turn around the limb, so that the bandage is anchored.
- If there is no assistance, wrap the ‘tail’ of the bandage directly around the padding over the wound.
- Bandage up the limb, making sure each turn overlaps the turn before. Alternatively, you can bandage in a ‘figure eight’ fashion.
- Make sure the bandage isn’t too tight so you don’t reduce blood flow to the extremities (hands and feet). Check by pressing on a fingernail or toenail of the injured limb – if the pink colour returns within a couple of seconds, the bandage isn’t affecting the person’s circulation. If the nail remains white for some time, loosen the bandage. Keep checking and adjusting the bandage, especially if swelling is a problem.

**Making an arm sling**

After being bandaged, an injured forearm or wrist may require an arm sling to lift the arm and keep it from moving. Steps include:

- Arrange the person’s arm in a ‘V’ so that it is held in front of their body and bent at the elbow, with the hand resting in the hollow where the collarbone meets the shoulder.
- Open a triangular bandage and place it on top of the injured arm. The longest edge needs to be lengthwise along the person’s body and the point of the bandage should be towards the person’s elbow on their injured side. You only need enough material to tie a knot at the fingertips end.
- Create a cradle (hammock) around the injured arm by folding the upper half of the long edge under the injured arm.
- Gently gather the material together at the elbow and pull it tight without pulling the bandage off the injured arm. Twist the material into a long spiral.
- Bring the long spiral around and then up the person’s back.
- Tie the two ends together firmly at the person’s fingertips.

**Where to get help**

- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
Things to remember

- Some knowledge of basic first aid could mean the difference between life and death.
- Consider doing a first aid course, so that you will be able to manage if someone is injured or becomes ill.
- CPR is a life-saving skill that everyone should learn.
- Keep a range of first aid kits handy at home, in the car and at work.

References

- Student Notes, First Aid International. More information here.
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More information

First Aid

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- First aid basics
- Emergency situations
- Common symptoms
- Burns breaks and falls
- Wounds cuts and bleeding
- Bites and stings
- Heat and cold

First aid basics

- First aid basics and DRSABCD
  Some knowledge of basic first aid can mean the difference between life and death.
- Asthma emergency first aid
  Asthma attacks need urgent emergency first aid. In an emergency, always call triple zero (000).
- Bites and stings – first aid
  If you are bitten or stung by an insect or animal, apply first aid and seek medical treatment as soon as possible.
- First aid kit
  Your first aid kit should be organised, properly stocked and available at all times.

Emergency situations

- Allergic reactions emergency first aid
  Severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) and asthma attacks need urgent emergency first aid. In an emergency, always call triple zero (000).
- Allergies to bites and stings
  Allergies to insect stings and bites range from milder allergic reactions to life-threatening, severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis).
- Anaphylaxis
  Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that requires urgent medical attention.
- Choking
  Don't slap a choking person on the back while they are upright - gravity may cause the object to slip further down their windpipe.
- Diabetic coma
  Diabetic coma is a medical emergency and needs prompt medical treatment.
- Drug overdose

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Alcohol, medications, illegal drugs and some herbal remedies can all cause damage if an overdose is taken.

- Electric shock
  Always disconnect the power supply before trying to help a victim of electric shock.

- Epilepsy - first aid and safety
  Good seizure management is an important part of reducing the risks associated with epilepsy.

- Head and spinal injuries first aid
  Head injuries can be serious and require urgent medical attention. A hard blow to the head from a fall, knock or assault can injure the brain, even when there are no visible signs of trauma to the...

- Head injuries and concussion
  There is no specific treatment for mild head injury other than plenty of rest, and not overdoing things.

- Heart attack
  Heart attack is an emergency. If you have warning signs of heart attack, get help fast. Call triple zero (000) and ask for an ambulance.

- Heat stress – preventing heatstroke
  Heatstroke is a life-threatening emergency that can be avoided by following simple prevention measures.

- How drugs affect your body
  Drugs affect your body’s central nervous system. They affect how you think, feel and behave.

- Mushroom poisoning
  Contrary to popular belief, there is no home test that can distinguish between edible and poisonous varieties of wild fungi or mushrooms.

- Poisoning and child safety
  Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 immediately if you suspect your child has been poisoned or given the wrong medicine or the wrong dose of medicine.

- Shock
  Shock is when there is not enough blood circulating in the body. It is a life-threatening medical emergency.

- Stroke explained
  A stroke interrupts blood flow to an area of the brain and is a medical emergency.

**Common symptoms**

- Abdominal pain in adults
  The type of pain felt in the abdomen can vary greatly.

- Abdominal pain in children
  Children may feel stomach pain for a range of reasons and may need treatment.

- Bleeding
  Bleeding may be minor or it may be a life-threatening medical emergency.

- Chest pain
  If in doubt about the cause of your chest pain, call an ambulance.

- Coughing and wheezing in children
  Coughing and wheezing in babies can be distressing for you and your baby, but in most cases symptoms can be relieved at home.

- Diarrhoea
  Acute diarrhoea in babies and young children can be life threatening.

- Fainting
  Common causes of fainting include heat, pain, distress, the sight of blood, anxiety and hyperventilating.

- Fever - children
  Fever is a way in which the body fights infection. A fever is not dangerous and does not always indicate a serious illness.
- **Muscle cramp**
  A muscle cramp is an uncontrollable and painful spasm of a muscle.

- **Poisoning and child safety**
  Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 immediately if you suspect your child has been poisoned or given the wrong medicine or the wrong dose of medicine.

**Burns breaks and falls**

- **Ankle sprains**
  Ankle sprain is a common sports injury caused by overstretching and tearing the supporting ligaments.

- **Bone fractures**
  Common sites for bone fractures include the wrist, ankle and hip.

- **Burns and scalds**
  Immediate first aid for all burns is to hold the burn under cool running water for at least 20 minutes.
  Most hot tap water scald injuries to children happen in the bathroom.

- **Dental injuries - knocked out teeth**
  A knocked out permanent tooth can survive if it is immediately put back. Do not put a knocked-out baby tooth back.

- **Eye injuries - chemical burns**
  Always wear safety goggles or a face shield when handling liquid or powder chemicals.

- **Eye injuries - foreign body in the eye**
  Don't try to remove a foreign body from your eye - go to your doctor or hospital emergency department for help.

- **Eyes - flash burns**
  Flash burns are like sunburn in the eye and can affect both your eyes. Find out more.

- **Head and spinal injuries first aid**
  Head injuries can be serious and require urgent medical attention. A hard blow to the head from a fall, knock or assault can injure the brain, even when there are no visible signs of trauma to the...

- **Head injuries and concussion**
  There is no specific treatment for mild head injury other than plenty of rest, and not overdoing things.

**Wounds cuts and bleeding**

- **Blisters**
  A blister is one of the body's responses to injury or friction.

- **Needlestick injury**
  A needlestick injury means the skin is accidentally punctured by a used needle. Diseases that could be transmitted by a needle or needlestick injury include human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

- **Nosebleeds**
  Bleeding from the nose is common in children and is usually not severe or serious.

- **Skin cuts and abrasions**
  The body begins repairing a wound immediately and the process may continue for days, weeks, months or even years.

- **Wounds - how to care for them**
  Chronic wounds are more likely to heal if they are treated with moist rather than dry dressings.

**Bites and stings**

- **Bites and stings – first aid**
  If you are bitten or stung by an insect or animal, apply first aid and seek medical treatment as soon as possible.
• Allergies to bites and stings
  Allergies to insect stings and bites range from milder allergic reactions to life-threatening, severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis).

• Animals and child safety
  Children should always be closely supervised near animals and taught how to behave safely around pets.

• Bedbugs
  Bedbugs have highly developed mouth parts that can pierce skin.

• Body lice
  Body lice can spread from one person to another when the environmental conditions are crowded and unhygienic.

• European wasp
  Unlike a bee, which can only sting once (and leaves the stinger behind in the skin), the European wasp can sting repeatedly.

• Fleas
  Fleas are parasites that feed off the blood of humans and animals, and can spread infection.

• Spiders
  Australia has about 2,000 species of spider but most species are relatively harmless to humans.

• White tailed spider
  In most cases, the bite from a white tailed spider only causes a mild reaction, including itching and skin discoloration.

Heat and cold

• Frostbite
  Exhaustion, hunger and dehydration further lower the body's defences against frostbite.

• Heat stress and heat-related illness
  Heat kills more Australians than any natural disaster. Find out how you can treat and prevent heat-related illness.

• Heat stress and older people
  People aged 65 years and over are at increased risk of heat-related illnesses and need special care in hot weather.

• Heat stress – preventing heatstroke
  Heatstroke is a life-threatening emergency that can be avoided by following simple prevention measures.

• Hot weather and child safety
  Babies and children can quickly lose body fluids in hot weather, which can lead to dehydration.

• Hypothermia
  The early responses to hypothermia will be moving around, seeking shelter, hair standing on end (goosebumps) and shivering.

• Snow sports and cold-related injuries
  You can help reduce your risk of winter sports injuries with planning, preparation and proper equipment.

Related Information

• Flu (influenza) – immunisation
  Influenza immunisation is recommended for people in known high risk groups.

• Bird flu (avian influenza)
  The symptoms of bird flu in humans are similar to those of regular influenza.

• First aid kits
  Your first aid kit should be organised, properly stocked and available at all times.

• Bites and stings – first aid
  If you are bitten or stung by an insect or animal, apply first aid and seek medical treatment as soon as possible.

• Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
CPR is a life-saving skill that everyone should learn from an accredited organisation.

Related information on other websites
- Australian Red Cross – First Aid
- Life Saving Victoria
- St John Ambulance Australia

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