

Part 1 - Introduction to First Aid

Principles of First Aid

In Australia, first aid has been as much a part of the culture as billy tea. In the early towns and on the goldfields, caring volunteers and individuals performed a much-needed service to the sick and injured, and laid the foundations for the traditional first aid organisations.

The period between the World Wars saw an increased awareness in the community of the benefits of first aid and the combining of other activities, such as surf life saving, with first aid training. It was not until the 1960's and 1970's that the general public became involved by attending first aid classes and using this newfound knowledge to their benefit. First aid training has now become virtually indispensable to industry and for an active social life.

WHAT IS FIRST AID?

First aid is the initial care of the injured or sick. It is the care administered by a concerned person as soon as possible after an accident or illness. It is this prompt care and attention prior to the arrival of the ambulance, that sometimes means the difference between life and death, or between a full or partial recovery.

First aid has limitations, as not everybody is a paramedic or doctor, but it is an essential and vital element of the total medical system. **FIRST AID SAVES LIVES!** ...ask any person who works in the emergency medical field.

IMMEDIATE ACTION

As in most endeavours, the principle to be adopted in first aid is immediate action. Bystanders or relatives not knowing what to do, or being too timid to try, have unwittingly contributed to unnecessary deaths and chronic injuries. If a person is sick or injured, then they need help — and they need it *immediately*.

It is important that any action taken by the first aid provider is commenced as quickly as possible. Quick action is necessary to preserve life and limb. A casualty who is not breathing effectively, or is bleeding copiously, requires immediate intervention. If quick effective first aid is provided, then the casualty's has a much better chance of a good recovery.

It should be remembered though that any action undertaken is to be deliberate, and panic by the first aid provider and bystanders will not be beneficial to the casualty. Try to remain calm and think your actions through. A calm and controlled first aider will give everyone confidence that the event is being handled efficiently and effectively.

WILL I HARM THE CASUALTY?

It is unlikely that the casualty being treated by a trained first aid provider will come to any additional harm, provided that the care and treatment is rendered in accordance with the provider's level of training. Many horror stories abound of well meaning first aiders causing irreversible injuries to their casualties, but these are usually just that — stories! If first aid is administered quickly, effectively, and with due care, then the casualty will not suffer any additional harm.

The Australian legal system recognises that everyone has a 'duty of care' towards others. Courts take a benevolent view towards first aid providers. Provided that any care and treatment was undertaken for the good of the casualty, that no deliberate harm was caused, and that the incident was handled as if by 'a reasonable person', then the first aid provider should have no fear of litigation.

HOW DO I GET HELP?

To get expert medical assistance, call an ambulance on '000' (*emergency number for Australia, check your local emergency number*) as early as possible. If you are attending a casualty, get a bystander to telephone for help. If you are on your own then you may have to leave the casualty momentarily to make a call. It's common sense, the decision is yours!

If you are calling from a mobile phone, you can dial '112' to call for assistance! (number for Australia, check your local emergency number)

'MEDIC ALERT'

Some individuals suffer from certain medical conditions that may cause them to present with serious signs and symptoms at any time. As a form of assistance and notification, these people may wear a form of medical identification, usually a special bracelet, or less commonly, a necklace. These devices are commonly referred to as 'Medic Alert' bracelets, but other types are available, such as 'Vial of Life' and 'SOS Talisman'.

They are imprinted with the person's identity, the relevant medical condition, and other details which may include allergies, drugs required, or specialised medical contact. Medical conditions that may be notified vary from specific heart diseases, to diabetes, epilepsy, asthma, and serious allergies.

Part 2 - Essential First Aid

DRABC!

DRABC is the prime consideration for everyone involved in the care and treatment of casualties. Experienced first aid providers, ambulance crews, nurses and medical specialists, are all-aware of the importance of **D**anger, **R**esponse, **A**irway, **B**reathing and **C**irculation.

DANGER



- to **yourself**: don't put yourself in danger!
- to **others**: don't allow bystanders to be exposed to danger!
- to the **casualty**: remove the danger from the casualty, or the casualty from the danger!

RESPONSE



- gently '**shake and shout**' at the casualty. Do not shake young children or infants.
 - is the casualty **alert**?
 - is the casualty **drowsy** or **confused**?
 - is the casualty **unconscious**, but **reacting**?
 - is the casualty unconscious with **no reaction**?
- if unconscious, place the casualty in the stable side position

AIRWAY



- is the airway **open** and **clear**?
- is there **noisy** breathing?
- are there **potential obstructions** such as blood?
- if so, open and clear the airway!

BREATHING



- **look** to see if the chest rises!
 - **listen** for the sound of breathing!
 - **feel**, by putting your hand on the lower part of the chest
- if not breathing give 2 effective breaths and commence EAR

CIRCULATION



- is there a carotid **pulse**?
- is it **strong**?
- is it **regular**?
- is there major **blood loss**?

if no pulse present start CPR

If the casualty is **conscious**, then treat the injuries or illness according to the signs and symptoms. Remain with the casualty and call for assistance.

If the casualty is **unconscious**, and **breathing** spontaneously, leave him or her in the stable side position, then treat any injuries.