

10 Basic First Aid Procedures

First aid is the emergency care a sick or injured person gets. In some cases, it may be the only care someone needs, while in others, it may help them until paramedics arrive or they are taken to the hospital. The best way to prepare for these events is to get official first aid training, but until you are able to do so, you can learn some basic life-saving steps.

This article will explain the steps of first aid for various emergencies. It will also give [first aid examples](#) and explain when further care may be needed.

ABCs of First Aid

When someone is [unconscious](#), or unresponsive, a basic principle of first aid is ABC:

- **Airway:** If someone's not breathing, clear their airway.
- **Breathing:** If the airway is clear and they're still not breathing, provide rescue breathing.
- **Circulation:** Perform chest compressions to keep blood circulating, as well as rescue breathing. If the person is breathing but unresponsive, check their pulse. If their heart has stopped, provide chest compressions.

- D can stand for **disability** assessment, **deadly bleeding**, or automated external defibrillator (AED), which is a device that shocks the heart so it begins beating.¹
- E stands for **examination**—evaluating the person for signs of injury, bleeding, allergies, or other problems once you know they're breathing and their heart is beating.

CPR and AEDs

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR, is one of the most important emergency medical procedures. If a person is in [cardiac arrest](#), in which their heart is not beating, they could die. Performing CPR or using an AED could save their life. AEDs are available in many public areas and businesses. These devices are simplified for use even if you have never been trained.

What to Do When you suspect someone is in cardiac arrest, follow these steps:³

1. Get someone to call 911.
2. Start chest compressions immediately. Using both hands, push down hard and fast in the center of the chest, allowing the chest to come back up naturally between compressions. Continue until someone with more training has arrived.
3. If you're trained in CPR, use chest compressions and rescue breathing.
4. Use an AED if available. However, don't delay chest compressions to find the device. If possible, have someone else look for it instead.

Bleeding

The color of the blood and how it's leaving the body can give you a sense of the extent of the injury. Almost all bleeding can be controlled. If severe bleeding is allowed to continue, it can lead to [shock](#) and eventually death.⁴

While it is important to stop bleeding, remember the ABCs of first aid and check for something more serious first. Then:

1. Wash your hands or put on disposable gloves, if possible. This can help protect you from diseases like viral hepatitis and [HIV/AIDS](#).⁶
2. Rinse the wound with water.
3. Cover the wound with a gauze or cloth (towel, blanket, clothing, whatever's available).
4. Apply direct pressure to stop the blood flow and encourage clotting, which is when blood naturally thickens to stop blood loss.
5. If possible, elevate the bleeding body part above the heart.
6. Don't remove the cloth if it becomes soaked through, but add more layers if needed. Removing the first layer will interfere with the clotting process and result in more blood loss.
7. Once bleeding has stopped, apply a clean bandage.

Make sure someone keeps treating the person during the drive to the hospital or while you wait for an ambulance.

Burns

The first step to [treating a burn](#) is to stop the burning process.⁹ Chemicals need to be cleaned off. Electricity needs to be turned off. Heat needs to be cooled down with running water. Those with sunburns need to be covered up or go inside.

Major burns need emergency medical attention.¹⁰ Call 911 or get someone else to call once the burning process has been stopped.

For other burns, take these first aid steps:

1. Flush the burned area with cool running water for several minutes. Do not use ice.¹¹
2. Apply a light gauze bandage. (You may apply an ointment, like aloe vera, before doing so if the burn is minor.)¹²
3. Take [Motrin \(ibuprofen\)](#) or Tylenol (acetaminophen) for pain relief, if necessary.
4. Do not break any blisters that may have formed.¹²

Blisters

[Blisters](#) are designed to protect the damaged skin underneath while it heals. Whether or not it should be treated, and how so, depends on the qualities of the blister and your overall health.

If the blister is small, unbroken, and not very painful, it's best to leave it alone. Cover it to prevent rubbing that could cause it to swell and possibly burst. Popping a blister may let in bacteria that could lead to an infection.¹³

If the blister is large or painful, follow these steps:¹⁴

1. Wash your hands and sterilize a needle with alcohol.
2. Make small punctures at the edge of the blister.
3. Gently push the fluid out.
4. Apply antibiotic ointment.
5. Put on a bandage.
6. If possible, take steps to protect the area from further rubbing or pressure.

If the blister broke open on its own:

1. Gently wash with clean water only.
2. Smooth the flap of broken skin over the newly exposed skin, unless it's dirty, torn, or pus has gathered under it.
3. Apply petroleum jelly.
4. Bandage it.

Change the bandage any time it gets wet. Take it off when you go to bed so the area can air out.

Broken Bone or Fracture

Any injury to your limbs, hands, and feet needs to be [treated as a broken bone](#) until an X-ray can confirm what you're dealing with. Call 911 immediately if:

- The person is bleeding profusely, is unresponsive, not breathing, or has numerous injuries
- You suspect a fracture or other serious injury to the spinal column, head, hip, pelvis, or thigh. In this case, the person should not be moved except by trained medical personnel.
- A broken bone protrudes from the skin, known as an [open or compound fracture](#)
- The area below an injured joint feels cold and clammy or becomes bluish
- You can't immobilize the injury well enough to transport the person

If these don't apply, use first aid and then go to an urgent care or contact your healthcare provider for guidance.