

# Herald Sun

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## How to save a life

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First aid ... Could you save a life?

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**MOST of us will be faced with a first-aid emergency at least once in our lives. But will we know what to do when the time comes?**

Paula O'Brien, a training officer with St John's Ambulance in South Australia, says the golden rule in first-aid situations is to always call an ambulance.

"Ambulance officers would prefer you call them and they are not needed by the time they get there, than that you not call them at all."

Here is a basic guide to administering first aid.

### Choking

The first thing to do when someone is choking is to make them relax, then get them to take a deep breath and cough, O'Brien says.

"Automatically, people will try to cough anyway, but the standard first aid procedure is to try to get them to cough and hopefully that will dislodge the object."

### The standard procedure is:

- Encourage the patient to relax and breathe deeply.
- Ask the person to cough to remove the object.
- If coughing doesn't help, call 000 for an ambulance.
- Bend the person well forward and give up to five sharp blows with the heel of one hand in the middle of the back between the shoulder blades.
- If the blockage has not cleared after five back blows, place one hand in the middle of the person's back for support. Place the heel of the other hand in the CPR compression position on the chest. Give five chest thrusts – slower but sharper than CPR compressions.

O'Brien says to ignore anything you see on TV: the Heimlich manoeuvre, made famous in the movies, where someone holds a victim's abdomen and thrusts at the waist, is not something to try at home.

She says regardless of the object – a piece of food or a piece of Lego – the procedure remains the same.

“But if it is a baby choking, you will need to get their head on a downward angle by placing them on your forearm, and for a child you can put them across your knee with their head heading down to the ground, just to get gravity to help you to help.”

### **Breathing ceases**

O’Brien says there are many reasons a person could stop breathing.

“It could be medical-related, it could be trauma-related, it could be accident-related,” she says. “The most important thing to do once you have ascertained there is no danger in the area and that the person isn’t responding, is to start clearing the airway and call an ambulance before starting CPR [cardio-pulmonary resuscitation].”

#### **The standard procedure is:**

- Tilt the head back. Look, listen and feel for breathing for up to 10 seconds.
- If the person is not breathing, place them in recovery position (farthest arm placed at a right angle to the body, nearer arm across the chest, bend the nearer knee and roll the person away from you onto their side while supporting the neck and head) and call 000.
- Turn the person onto their back and give two breaths, ensuring the chest rises with each breath.
- Give 30 compressions on the lower half of the breastbone, then tilt the head, lift the chin and give two breaths. Alternate 30 compressions with two breaths until medical aid arrives.
- For an adult or child, use two hands with fingers interlocked and two fingers for an infant (12 months or under).

### **Broken bones**

The golden rule when dealing with a broken bone is not to try to put the fracture back in place. Instead, manage any bleeding or shock.

#### **The standard procedure is:**

- Manage any bleeding or shock.
- Ensure you do not move the injured part.
- Call an ambulance.
- Support the limb if possible.

“You don’t need to put on a sling or tie a person’s legs together (unless you’re in a remote area), but if you’re dealing with a broken arm you can support it on a pillow. If it’s a leg, put pillows either side of the leg but don’t raise it. If there is a wound, cover it to stop infection getting in, but mostly, just keep it still,” says O’Brien.

“For any injury it is best to call an ambulance,” she says. “The person may have hit their head in a fall as well as breaking a bone, and it may be more serious than you realise.”

### **Seizures**

“The most important thing is to protect the person from danger,” O’Brien says.

“Do not restrain them and call an ambulance if this has never happened to this person before or if it goes on for longer than five minutes.”

#### **The standard procedure is:**

- Protect casualty from injury (move furniture out of the way).
- Do not restrict movement and do not place anything in their mouth.

- Place them on their side as soon as possible.
- Manage injuries.
- Do not disturb them if they fall asleep.
- Continue to check for signs of life.
- Call 000 if the seizure continues for more than five minutes, another seizure quickly follows, or the person has been injured.

### **Serious burns**

“First aid treatment for burns can be summed up simply: cool, cover and call for help,” O’Brien says.

#### **The standard procedure is:**

- Remove the person from danger.
- Hold the burnt area under cold running water for at least 20 minutes (depending on severity).
- Remove clothing or jewellery from the burnt area (unless it is sticking to the burn).
- Place a sterile, non-stick dressing over burn.
- Calm the person.
- Call 000.

If you don’t have a non-stick dressing available, O’Brien says cling wrap can be a good alternative, but don’t use butter, steaks or lotions.

Running water is preferable, because it won’t stick to the burn. Also, never put ice directly onto a burn. “Ice causes burns in itself,” she says.

### **Excessive bleeding**

“Assuming people have done the St John DRABCD Action Plan, they need to apply pressure to the wound and elevate the bleeding area and get the person to rest,” O’Brien says.

#### **The standard procedure is:**

- Remove or cut the person’s clothing to expose the wound.
- Apply direct pressure over the wound – instruct the patient to do this if possible. Otherwise, apply pressure with a pad or hands (use gloves if available).
- Squeeze the wound edges together.
- Raise and support the injured part by lying the person down.
- Raise the injured part gently above the level of the heart.
- Cover the wound using a pad and secure with a bandage.
- If bleeding is still not controlled, leave the initial pad in place and apply a second pad and secure with a bandage.
- If bleeding continues, replace again.
- If severe bleeding persists, call 000.
- Treat the person for shock if necessary.