

## First Aid

It would be ideal if we could prevent all injuries from happening in the first place. But in spite of our best efforts, injuries do occur. Injuries are the number one cause of death of children and adolescents, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Acting quickly to give effective first aid can reduce the consequences of many injuries. But just exactly what is effective first aid?

First aid is the help and medical assistance that someone gives -- not only to an injured person -- but to a person who is sick. And that injured or sick person could even be you.

But being able to administer effective first aid does not simply involve having a first aid kit on hand. Effective first aid also involves having the appropriate skills as well as good judgment and the ability to keep a clear head when confronted with a medical emergency.

First, you have to decide whether the injury or illness can be treated with what might be called “simple” first aid. Using a sports analogy, you have to decide whether to “run with the ball” or to “punt” to a professional. The heading of “dealing with it yourself” might include the application of a band-aid to a cut or taking an aspirin for a headache.

If the injury or illness is serious, it may require professional medical attention. This requires yet another decision. For example, someone cuts their finger with a kitchen knife. Can the bleeding be controlled with simple pressure and the application of a bandage or does the patient need to be taken to emergency care for possible stitches and a tetanus shot? Is time also a critical factor? If it is, you should immediately summon emergency medical assistance. You then need to determine what you can do to help the patient in the meantime. For example, by administering CPR (keep in mind that you should

only perform CPR if you have been properly trained in the procedure, you do not want to take any action that might exacerbate their condition).

Unfortunately, there is not just one first aid scenario that fits all situations. Let us consider a “bite”. Appropriate first aid depends on the origin of the bite. For example, is it from a snake, a dog, a spider, a tick, a bee, or even from a human? Other variables to consider include the number of bites and their location on the body. A mosquito bite would not be treated the same as for a bite from a wild animal, especially if there is the possibility that the animal might be rabid.

Burns may be from the sun, a scalding liquid, a chemical or electricity. Eye injuries can range from a blow to the eye, a corneal abrasion (scratch on the surface of the eye), a foreign object in the eye or a splash with a chemical. Skeletal injuries go from a simple sprain to a dislocation to a fracture (broken bone). The list goes on and on.

First aid is a complicated subject and it is situation-specific. The better informed and trained we all are, the better prepared we should be to deal with that unexpected illness or injury. But it cannot be emphasized enough that if you find yourself involved in a medical situation that may be beyond your abilities, you should not hesitate to summon emergency medical assistance immediately.

For in-depth first aid information, please visit the First Aid Center, which includes everything from Cuts, Scrapes and Puncture Wounds, Bumps and Bruises, to Heart Attack Symptoms and Warning Signs.