

## **FIRST AID – Level 3**

"First Aid is the immediate care given to an injured or sick person until the services of a physician can be obtained." This is the opening sentence in the American Red Cross First Aid Textbook for Juniors, and is the definition of First Aid. Notice that first aid is the immediate care that is performed before the professional medical assistance arrives. First aiders are not expected to be doctors or to have a great knowledge about medicine. If you are called on to administer first aid to an injured person, you must be able to recognize and treat some very important problems. Knowing what to do and what not to do before the professional arrives is expected.

### **PUNCTURE WOUNDS**

Whether you step on a nail or get a fishhook caught in your finger, there is always the danger of lockjaw with a puncture wound. The nail is easy to remove but a fishhook should be pushed all the way through your finger until the barb is sticking out the other side. The barb is then cut off and the fishhook pulled back out. If the fishhook is not very deep, try backing it out. With a finger or thumb, press down firmly on the shank of the hook near the bend. This disengages the barb from the tissue. Looping a length of string around the bend of the hook, pull firmly, jerking the barb out. Treat any puncture wound by washing it and applying an antiseptic. You should then see a doctor.

### **SNAKEBITES**

Generally speaking, if a snake bites someone, it was probably not poisonous. Nevertheless, the best treatment is to keep the victim calm and get him to a doctor immediately. If medical attention is several hours away, a snug bandage placed on either side of the bite will help slow down the spread of the poison. A snakebite kit with a suction cup should also be used immediately after the bite to remove some of the poison.

### **SPRAINS**

Who hasn't "sprained" his ankle at least once? Internally, the soft tissues surrounding the joint are injured and it begins to swell. Cold compresses will help keep the swelling down and ease the pain. If possible, it should also be bandaged to restrict movement.

### **SUNSTROKE**

Sunstroke is caused by too much exposure to the sun. The victim's face will be red and dry and his breathing will be slow and noisy. The skin will feel very dry and hot. Get the patient into a cool, shaded area and lay him down with his head higher than his body. Rubbing him with wet towels and giving him cold water to drink are ways to reduce his body temperature to normal.

## TICKS

When you are in tick country, you should always examine yourself for tick bites. If you find a tick that is burrowed in, do not pull him off as this may leave the tick's head buried in your skin. It is better if he backs out himself because you have made him uncomfortable. Touching him with a hot needle, covering him with a liquid such as mineral oil, or spraying him with short bursts of any type of insect spray until he backs out can do this. Once the tick is off, wash the area and apply an antiseptic.

## EMERGENCY FIRST AID

In addition to all of the situations addressed already, when you are treating someone with first aid, you must be able to recognize and treat three very important problems.

1. Make sure the victim is breathing
2. Stop or slow down any bleeding
3. Always treat the victim for shock

**The first** thing to look for is that the victim is breathing. Without air, they will begin to sustain brain damage within minutes. If the person is not breathing, you should immediately begin mouth-to-mouth artificial respiration. First, make sure that the victim's mouth is clear of anything that might prevent breathing, including the tongue. Second, placing one of your hands under the victim's neck, raise his head slightly and tilt it back by pressing on his forehead with your other hand. Third, still holding his neck up, pinch his nose with your other hand and place your mouth over the victim's mouth (if the victim is a small child or baby, place your mouth over his mouth and nose). Fourth, watching the victim's chest, blow air into the victim's lungs at the rate of 12 times per minute, allowing the person to exhale after each breath. If the victim is a small child or baby, blow into their lungs at the rate of 20 times per minute but with shallower breaths. This should be continued until the victim is breathing on his own or the ambulance arrives.

**The second** thing to do to help the victim is to stop or slow down any bleeding. Most bleeding can be stopped by direct pressure, that is, by putting pressure directly on the wound. Use a piece of cloth (or even your bare hand if necessary. If blood is spurting, do not run around searching for surgically clean bandages or cloths. A soiled cloth or a dirty hand is acceptable in this emergency). Press down on the wound to stop the bleeding. If possible, bandage the wound. If the direct pressure method does not work, then you will have to find the proper pressure point to slow down bleeding.

**The third** most important thing you can do for the victim is to treat him for shock. Shock is the body's way of reacting to an injury by reducing blood flow and upsetting other body functions. The body will go into shock after almost any accident but the degree of shock is determined by the severity of the injury. No matter what the injury is, treat all victims for shock. (Shock is a form of fainting.) If the person is unconscious, make certain his or her tongue is not obstructing the breathing passage. If possible lay him down and if there are no head injuries, raise his feet slightly by placing something under them. Cover the victim to keep him warm and if he is conscious, keep him quiet and talk to him to keep him calm.

If there were no one else around to go for help, now would be the time to leave the victim and call the police. By explaining to them what has happened and where the victim is, they will arrange for emergency service. Once this is done, you should return to the victim, ensuring that his condition remains stable, until the emergency service arrives.

**REMEMBER:** Make sure the victim is breathing, stop the bleeding and treat for shock.