

When Someone Stops Breathing

Choking, drowning, electric shock, auto or sports accidents, poisonous gas, suffocation, stroke or other medical problems can interrupt breathing. When a person stops breathing, it's a serious emergency. The person's chest doesn't move, the face and skin become bluish and there's no exhaled breath. Once breathing has stopped, permanent brain damage or death can result in four to six minutes. Every second counts.

Rescue Breathing Saves Lives

Don't take time to loosen clothing or warm the victim before beginning rescue breathing. Likewise, don't move the victim unless he or she is lying in a dangerous area. It's more important to know the steps of emergency breathing assistance and to begin immediately:

- While someone else calls or goes for help, such as dialing 911 or phoning for an ambulance, lay the victim face up.
- Remove any foreign matter from the mouth or airway.
- Place one hand on the victim's forehead. Use the other hand to lift under the chin or the base of the head, tilting the head back slightly to open the airway.
- Pinch the victim's nostrils shut.
- Placing your mouth over the victim's open mouth (or mouth and nose for children under six), breathe slowly into the victim, two full breaths, watching for the chest to rise. Use only small puffs of air for infants.
- Remove your mouth between breaths, allowing the chest to fall.
- Continue breathing into the victim's mouth, one breath every five seconds (every four seconds for a child and every three seconds for an infant), until the victim begins to breathe without help or until medical help arrives.

If the victim's chest doesn't rise, the airway may be obstructed. Try turning the head to one side and clearing the mouth of any foreign matter with your fingers. If that doesn't help, use the Heimlich maneuver.

Learn CPR

One last thing: Adults who stop breathing often have cardiac arrest and need cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR. If you have not been trained in this life-saving technique, consider getting training. Contact your local hospital, the American Heart Association, a school, a park district, a senior citizens center or the American Red Cross to find out about CPR classes. Remember, older people require specialized techniques since their bones are more fragile. Caregivers should take refresher classes every year.

