

## WHAT IS CPR?

When someone's blood flow or breathing stops, seconds count. Permanent brain damage or death can happen quickly. If you know how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), you could save a life. CPR is an emergency procedure for a person whose heart has stopped or is no longer breathing. CPR can maintain circulation and breathing until [emergency medical help](#) arrives.

Even if you haven't had training, you can do "hands-only" CPR for a teen or adult whose heart has stopped beating ("hands-only" CPR isn't recommended for children). "Hands-only" CPR uses chest compressions to keep blood circulating until emergency help arrives. If you've had training, you can use chest compressions, clear the airway, and do rescue breathing. Rescue breathing helps get oxygen to the lungs for a person who has stopped breathing. To keep your skills up, you should repeat the training every two years.



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# Breathing Difficulties

## - First Aid

Most people take breathing for granted. People with certain illnesses may have breathing problems that they deal with on a regular basis.

Breathing difficulties can range from:

- Being short of breath
- Being unable to take a deep breath and gasping for air

Feeling like you are not getting enough air

### Causes

There are many different causes for breathing problems. Common causes include some health conditions and sudden medical emergencies.

Some health conditions that may cause breathing problems are:

- Anemia (low red blood cell count)

#### Asthma

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), sometimes called emphysema or chronic bronchitis
- Heart disease or heart failure
- Lung cancer, or cancer that has spread to the lungs
- Respiratory infections, including [pneumonia](#), acute bronchitis, [whooping cough](#), [croup](#), and others

- Pericardial effusion (fluid surrounding the heart and not allowing it to fill properly)

Pleural effusion (fluid surrounding the lungs and compressing them)



Some medical emergencies that can cause breathing problems are:

- Being at a high altitude
- Blood clot in the lung
- [Collapsed lung \(pneumothorax\)](#)
- [Heart attack](#)
- Injury to the neck, chest wall, or lungs
- [Life-threatening allergic reaction](#)
- Near drowning, which causes fluid buildup in the lungs

### Symptoms

A person who is having a hard time breathing difficulty will often look uncomfortable. They may be:

- Breathing rapidly
- Unable to breathe lying down and need to sit up to breathe
- Very anxious and agitated

Sleepy or [confused](#)

They might have other symptoms, including:

- Dizziness
- Pain
- Fever

#### Cough

- Nausea
- Vomiting

#### Bluish lips, fingers, and fingernails

- Chest moving in an unusual way

Gurgling, [wheezing](#), or whistling sounds

- Muffled voice or difficulty speaking
- Coughing up blood
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat



## First Aid

If someone is having breathing difficulty, call 411 or your local emergency number right away, then:

- Check the person's airway, breathing, and pulse. If necessary, begin [CPR](#).
- Loosen any tight clothing.
- Help the person use any prescribed medicine (an asthma inhaler or home oxygen).
- Continue to monitor the person's breathing and pulse until medical help arrives. **DO NOT** assume that the person's condition is improving if you can no longer hear abnormal breath sounds, such as wheezing.
- If there are open wounds in the neck or chest, they must be closed immediately, especially if air bubbles appear in the wound. Bandage such wounds at once. A "sucking" chest wound allows air to enter the person's chest cavity with each breath. This can cause a [collapsed lung](#). Bandage the wound with plastic wrap, a plastic bag, or gauze pads covered with petroleum jelly, sealing it except for one corner. This allows trapped air to escape from the chest, but it prevents air from entering the chest through the wound.

#### **DO NOT:**

- Give the person food or drink.
- Move the person if there has been a chest or airway injury, unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Place a pillow under the person's head. This can close the airway.
  - Wait to see if the person's condition improves before getting medical help.
  - Get help immediately.