

First Aid: Shock



Shock occurs when the body's vital organs don't get enough oxygen-carrying blood. Without enough oxygen to fuel its parts, the body can't work properly and death may occur. Shock can happen in several ways. You may be in shock because you have lost too much blood (hemorrhagic or hypovolemic shock). You may also be in shock due to an overwhelming infection (septic shock), allergic reaction (anaphylactic shock), or injury to your spinal cord (neurogenic shock). Another form of shock is when your heart is not working right and is unable to pump blood throughout the body (cardiogenic shock). In many cases, first aid can only slow the progression of this life-threatening condition.

Call 911

Call 911 at the first sign of shock.

Signs of shock

- The skin or the pink tissue inside the lower lip may turn pale.
- The skin may feel cold and damp.
- The lips or fingernails may turn blue in someone with a light complexion. In someone with a dark complexion, lips and fingernails may look gray.
- The pulse may be so light that you can barely feel it. Or it may race so fast that you can't count the beats.
- The victim may be confused or unable to concentrate or may stare blankly. Over time, the victim may even become unconscious.

What to do

Step 1. Treat threats to life

- Call 911.
- Do CPR, if needed.
- Control any severe bleeding to help keep shock from worsening. Wear gloves or use other protection to avoid contact with victim's blood. Apply direct pressure on the wound to control the bleeding.

Step 2. Care for shock

- Call 911.
- If victim is unconscious but breathing, position the head and neck to keep the airway open. If there are no signs of injury to the head, neck, back, or hips, roll the victim onto their side. Rest the head on an extended arm and bend both knees.
- If the victim is responsive and breathing normally, place the person on their back. Raise both feet about 6 to 12 inches. Do this only if there are no possible broken bones or possible hip, back, or head injury. Don't raise the feet if raising them causes the victim pain.
- Cover victim, if needed, to maintain body temperature.

- Keep victim quiet and calm. Speaking uses oxygen and worsens the effects of shock.
- Don't give the victim anything to eat or drink.

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