

UNCONSCIOUSNESS

Dealing with unconsciousness

Unconsciousness can be caused by a range of accidents and illnesses and can last for seconds (fainting) or for long periods.

Someone who is unconscious can still be murmuring or their eyes may be rolling.

One of the biggest concerns regarding someone who is unconscious is keeping the airway open. If someone is unconscious and laid on their back they are at risk of the airway being blocked either by the tongue (fig 1) or by vomit. They cannot respond and clear the airway because they are unconscious.

If somebody comes round quickly, give them a few minutes to recover, if they have no further symptoms they may not need emergency help. They should however seek advice from a medical professional.

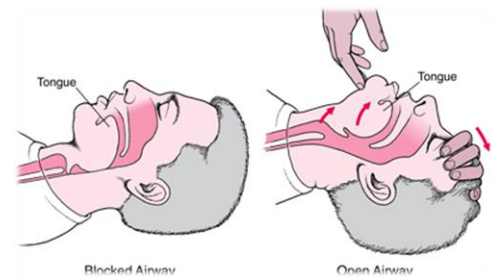


Figure 1 <http://www.adamimages.com/>

This is where the recovery position is useful because it puts the casualty on their side where these risks are greatly reduced.



Figure 2 <http://www.adamimages.com/>

The Recovery Position



There are 3 main questions you need to ask yourself:

1. Are they conscious?

Levels of consciousness can be assessed using the AVPU scale:

A -Alert	Fully alert and responsive; able to talk answer simple questions.
V- Voice	Confused; not fully alert but able to speak and answer some questions Inappropriate words; able to speak but not in clear sentences Utter Sounds; can make sounds but not speak clearly No verbal response; no noise
P Pain	Localise pain; casualty can respond to pain and indicate where it is Responds to pain but cannot indicate where
U Unresponsive	Unresponsive to pain and speech

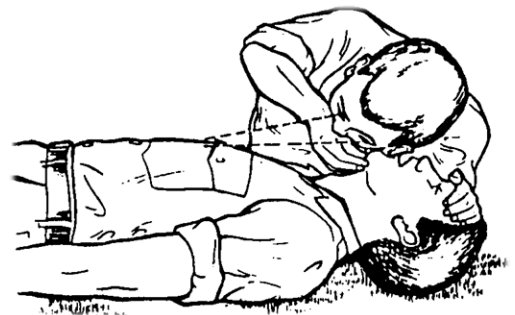
2. Are they breathing?

Most importantly establish that they are still breathing, look listen and feel for breath. Tip the head back first to open the airway.

Look down the chest to see rise and fall.

Listen at the mouth to hear breath.

Feel with your ear/check air passing by.



If they are not breathing call 999 and commence CPR*

3. Have they fallen from a height?

It is important to consider if the person has suffered an impact or blow. Just a one foot fall is high enough to be considered an impact.

If there has been an impact or if you are uncertain if there was an impact then **do not move the casualty unless airway is at risk.**

If you can stay with them and monitor their breathing then **ONLY** move them if the airway becomes blocked.

If you **have** to leave them; put them in the recovery position so that the airway is safe while you are gone.



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Recap:

1. Are they breathing? Head back to open the airway, look, listen, feel.
2. Are they conscious? Talk to them and tap the collar bone.
3. Have they had an impact? Yes, don't move them.
 - ◆ Can I stay with them?
 - If yes leave them as they fell and monitor breathing (if they stop breathing check the tongue or vomit isn't blocking the airway and be prepared to do CPR*)
 - ◆ If no impact (or if you must leave them to get help); turn them onto their side using the Recovery Position
4. Call 999 – ask for mountain rescue if you are far from a road.

It may be obvious that there is an injury. If it is a serious injury and the casualty is breathing, deal with the injury first. Keep monitoring breathing!

As with any first aid situation ensure you are safe first. If you get injured no one can help!!

*CPR Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation. Crudely, this means putting in air and pumping the heart, breathing for the casualty. There are videos available on you tube and some have tried it successfully with no training but THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR PRACTICAL TRAINING ON CPR.

