Emergency life support skills for everyone

A step-by-step guide to dealing with a life-threatening emergency
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Introduction

Emergency life support (ELS) is the set of actions needed to keep someone alive in an emergency until professional help arrives. ELS skills can be used in a wide range of emergency situations, from choking and serious bleeding to cardiac arrest. The aim of this book is to teach you these skills step by step.

In a life-threatening emergency, what you do can make the difference between life and death. If you stay calm, act quickly and use your ELS skills, you can increase a person’s chances of survival.

You may have completed a Heartstart UK or first-aid course at school. You can use this book to revise your skills, and to help you remember the basic principles of ELS. You can also keep your skills up to date by taking a refresher course, which your school may arrange. At the back of the book is a list of organisations that can give you information about courses in your area.

ELS skills need to be practised frequently on a specially designed resuscitation training manikin. You should never practise rescue breathing, chest compression or choking procedures on another person – it’s extremely dangerous.
The Chain of Survival

Cardiac arrest is when the heart stops pumping. It is usually caused by the heart beating in a random, unco-ordinated way instead of beating regularly. This is known as ventricular fibrillation. When a person has stopped breathing and their heart has stopped pumping, it only takes a few minutes for their brain to become damaged. The only way to restart the heart is with a defibrillator, which is a machine that gives a controlled electric shock.

The Chain of Survival represents the sequence of actions that needs to occur as quickly as possible to give a person the best chance of survival in a life-threatening emergency.

By recognising an emergency such as a heart attack and getting help early, you may help prevent cardiac arrest. In cardiac arrest, if you call 999 or 112 for an ambulance early, you ensure that help, including a defibrillator, is on the way.

You can then help keep the person alive by providing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) until help arrives. Early CPR buys time by helping to get enough oxygen to vital organs to keep the casualty alive until the heart can be restarted.

By starting the Chain of Survival early, you can save lives.