

Unconsciousness is caused by an interruption of the brain's normal activity. This can be caused by strokes, head trauma, seizures or lack of oxygen.

When a casualty is unconscious, their muscles become relaxed, including their swallowing muscles, and if the casualty is not placed on their side, they can choke on their own fluids. If an unconscious casualty is left on their back, their tongue may fall back and block the airway. An unconscious casualty is still breathing and has a pulse, but may not respond to gentle shouting and stimulation. They look like they are in a deep sleep, but cannot be woken up. They may not respond to verbal or painful stimuli.

Causes of unconsciousness

- A** – Alcohol or asphyxiation
- E** – Epilepsy
- I** – Insulin – Diabetic
- O** – Overdose
- U** – Uraemia – Kidney damage
- T** – Trauma
- I** – Infection
- P** – Pressure, or Poison
- S** – Stroke, Spinal Injury, Shock



Infants and small children should never be shaken as this can cause death or severe brain injury. They should be assessed by shouting and gentle stimulation.

Signs and symptoms

- Casualty has a pulse.
- Casualty is breathing.
- Casualty seems to be sleeping but cannot be woken up.
- Casualty may moan or groan when stimulated or asked to open their eyes.

Treatment of an unconscious casualty

- ✓ Seek medical aid immediately.
- ✗ Give the casualty Nil by Mouth.
- ✓ Place the casualty into the lateral position supporting the neck and Head.
 - It obtains and maintains an open airway.
 - Although you cannot swallow your tongue, the tongue can fall across the airway and block it. When placed in the lateral position tongue falls away from the back of the mouth.
 - Fluids and objects will drain away from the mouth.



If an Ambulance is required - call immediately - do not delay

- ✓ Place the head in a low position to allow free drainage of fluid.
- ✓ Even if cervical or spinal injury is suspected, the casualty must still be gently and carefully log rolled into the lateral position.
 - One person supports the neck and head.
 - One or two people support the back and the body.
 - One person supports the legs.
 - Roll the body smoothly and gently and in alignment with no twisting or jerking.
- ✓ Avoid pressure on the chest.
- ✓ Loosen any tight clothing from around the neck, chest, and waist. It makes breathing a lot easier.
- ✓ Always talk to and reassure the casualty. Although they look like they are asleep, they can sometimes hear everything you say.
- ✓ Do a head to toe examination.
- ✓ Treat other injuries.
- ✓ Cover the casualty lightly if they are cold.
- ✓ Stay with the casualty and monitor their vital signs.



Place a pregnant woman on her left hand side and support her stomach to allow proper blood flow to the baby and the lower limbs if injuries permit.

Remember the unconscious casualty who is not placed on their side is at risk of an obstructed airway.

These casualties often die from suffocation if the airway is not opened, cleared and maintained.



Potential hazards

- Loss of swallowing and coughing reflexes: this can cause the casualty to choke, as they cannot clear their airway by swallowing or coughing.
- Regurgitation: this occurs in an unconscious casualty as the muscle on the top of the stomach is relaxed and allows gastric juices from the stomach to flow from the stomach into the lungs.
- Vomiting: this occurs when the stomach ejects its contents. If the unconscious casualty's airway is not cleared, it will block the airway. If the unconscious casualty inhales the vomitus it will damage the lungs.