

# Ochsner Health System



## A GUIDE TO EMERGENCY CARE





*Life as an adult can be challenging. From the daily trek to work and home to the weekend*

*warrior home improvement projects, accidents can and often do happen. Sometimes it's hard to know if you should seek emergency care or what to do before arriving in the emergency department. This guide will help you make your way through life's little obstacles, hopefully with minimal injury.*

## ABDOMINAL PAIN

At one time or another, we all experience abdominal pain or discomfort, whether from that extra slice of grandmother's pie or a viral or bacterial infection.

### Ease the ache:

- Try to sip water or suck on ice chips.
- Once you begin to feel better, try eating bland foods, such as dry toast or crackers.
- If stomach acid is the problem, try an antacid to stop the burn.

### Seek emergency care if:

- You experience severe pain or persistent vomiting or diarrhea
- The pain is accompanied by shortness of breath, dizziness, bleeding or a high fever
- The pain is sudden and severe
- The pain moves to your chest, neck or shoulder
- There is blood in your vomit, urine or stool
- Your abdomen is swollen and tender



## ASTHMA

Millions of Americans suffer from asthma, a chronic lung disease affecting the airways and restricting breathing. You should manage your asthma daily in order to avoid an asthma attack or episode.

### Breathe easy:

- Know your triggers, whether they are animals, dust mites, mold, tobacco, cold air or exercise, and avoid them.
- If you need a daily controller medication to provide long term flare-up prevention, take it daily.
- Keep an inhaler with you at all times to help you in the event of an episode.
- Recognize the early signs of an attack before it begins.

Even with daily and long term asthma management, an attack can occur.

### Seek emergency care if:

- The attack does not get better after taking your asthma medication.
- You feel better after taking medication, but serious symptoms come back quickly.
- Your lips and fingernails are bluish or grayish.
- You have a hard time talking or walking.

## BROKEN BONES

From church softball leagues and bicycle rides to car accidents and falls from tree houses, the potential for broken bones is all around us. If you do break a bone, you'll need to seek immediate medical attention.

### Signs of a break:

- Misshapen limb or joint
- Swelling, bruising or bleeding
- Severe pain
- Numbness and tingling
- Limited mobility or cannot move the limb

### Fracture first aid:

- Apply pressure to the wound with a clean cloth or sterile bandage to stop any bleeding.
- Do not try to realign the bone. Keep the injured area immobilized.
- Apply ice packs to the injured area to reduce swelling and relieve pain. Do not apply ice directly to the skin – wrap ice in a towel or cloth.
- Feeling faint or being short of breath could be signs of shock. Lay the person down with their feet elevated if possible.



# BURNS

Burns are categorized by their severity, ranging from first or second degree to third degree.

A first degree burn is the least serious of the three and only involves the outer layer of skin. First degree burns cause the skin to appear red and may involve swelling and pain. An example would be a sun burn.

Second degree burns occur when the first layer of skin has been burned through, causing the second layer of skin to be burned. In this case, blisters will develop and the skin will appear very red and splotchy, accompanied by severe pain and swelling. These burns can occur from sun exposure or contact with ovens, irons, BBQ grills or fireworks.

A third degree burn is the most serious category, involving all layers of the skin and possibly muscle and bone. A third degree burn causes the skin to appear charred black or dry and white and results in permanent tissue damage.

## Treating minor burns:

- Cool the burn by holding it under cold running water, submerging it in cold water or applying cold compresses.
- Keep the burn covered with loosely tied soft gauze.
- Use an over-the-counter pain reliever to alleviate pain.

Do not apply ice directly to the burned area as this could further damage the skin.

## Treating major burns:

- Seek emergency medical care
- Do not remove burned clothing
- Do not submerge large, severe burns in cold water
- Ensure that the person is breathing and that circulation is flowing
- If possible, elevate the burned portion of the body above the level of the heart
- Cover the burned area with a cool, moist bandage



## FEVER

A fever is often your body's method of fighting an infection, with a higher temperature making it harder for viruses and bacteria to thrive. A fever can be caused by a variety of illnesses and it will need to be treated according to its cause.

Your physician may suggest treating an adult with a fever with over-the-counter medicines such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. (Do not give children aspirin or ibuprofen unless a physician advises you to).

### Seek emergency care if:

- Your fever is uncontrolled by over-the-counter medications, such as Tylenol or Motrin – taken as directed
- You also have a severe headache
- You have severe throat swelling
- There is an unusual skin rash
- You have an unusual sensitivity to light
- Your neck is stiff and painful
- Your mental state is altered
- You experience persistent vomiting
- There is difficulty breathing or chest pain
- You experience abdominal pain or pain when urinating

## HEAD INJURIES

More than half a million people are hospitalized each year as a result of severe head injuries. These can be caused by anything from slipping on ice (and hitting your head) to car or sporting accidents.

### Seek emergency care if:

- There is loss of consciousness
- The person is confused, drowsy or lethargic or becomes restless, clumsy or loses coordination
- There is severe head or facial bleeding
- The person is on blood thinning medications, such as Plavix or Coumadin/Warfarin
- The person stops breathing
- The person experiences convulsions
- The person's pupil's change in size or there is blurred vision
- There are personality changes or unusual behavior



## LACERATIONS

It could happen when chopping a tomato too quickly, stepping on a sharp object such as a nail or being careless when trimming that board for your weekend project. We have all experienced cuts, scrapes or punctures at some point. Most often these can be treated at home.

- Wash the cut with soap and water
- Apply direct pressure to the cut to stop the bleeding
- Use an antibacterial ointment to help prevent infection
- Protect the cut from dirt by covering it with a clean bandage

### Seek emergency care if:

- Bleeding is severe, spurting or does not stop after 15 minutes of pressure
- The wound is large or deep
- The cut is more than a quarter inch deep
- The injury is caused by a rusty object, fishhook, animal bite or nail
- There is debris in the wound
- There are signs of infection – warmth and redness, a painful or throbbing sensation, fever, swelling or a pus-like discharge
- You have not had a tetanus shot within the last 10 years

## LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Losing consciousness or fainting is usually caused by a sudden drop in blood pressure which leads to a decrease in the blood supply to the brain. This can be caused by a number of factors from heat exhaustion or emotional distress to standing too quickly or a drop in blood sugar. Because fainting could be the result of something serious, it should be treated as a medical emergency until the cause is determined and relieved.

### Feeling faint:

- Sit or lie down
- Place your head between your knees while sitting
- Discuss any fainting spells with your doctor





## SEIZURES

Seizures are the result of sudden, abnormal electrical activity in the brain. Most seizures last from 30 seconds to two minutes and do not cause permanent damage.

### Help someone experiencing a seizure by:

- Clearing the area around the person of all sharp and hard objects
- Loosening any ties or clothing around the person's neck
- Putting a flat, soft object under the person's head
- Turning the person onto one side to ensure the airway remains clear
- Timing the seizure



Do not attempt to place an object in the person's mouth during the seizure. The person cannot swallow his or her tongue during the seizure and placing an object in their mouth could injure the teeth or jaw.

### Seek emergency care if:

- This is the first time experiencing a seizure
- There are multiple seizures in a row
- If the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes or the person does not wake up between multiple seizures



# WHEN SECONDS COUNT: HEART ATTACK • STROKE

## HEART ATTACK

When it comes to a heart attack, time is critical. If you suspect you or someone you know is having a heart attack, call 9-1-1 and **get emergency care immediately**.

Do **NOT** attempt to drive yourself to the emergency department.

### Know the signs (symptoms may be sudden or gradual):

- Pain, discomfort, heaviness, tightness, pressure, aching, burning, fullness or squeezing in the center of the chest that lasts for a few minutes or goes away and comes back
- Pain or discomfort in the arms, left shoulder, back, neck, jaw or stomach
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating
- Indigestion or choking feeling
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Extreme weakness
- Rapid or irregular heart beats

Women may have different symptoms from men. Women often report fatigue, sleep disturbances, shortness of breath, indigestion or anxiety for a month or longer before an actual heart attack.

## STROKE

According to the American Stroke Association, 700,000 people have a new or repeat stroke every year, with more than 150,000 losing their lives as a result. A stroke can be caused by a blood clot obstructing the flow of blood to the brain or by the rupturing of a vessel, which then bleeds into the brain. If you suspect you or someone you know is having a stroke, call 9-1-1 and get emergency care immediately. Do NOT attempt to drive yourself to the emergency department.

### Know the signs:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache
- Sudden onset of loss of bowel or bladder control