



SAVE A LIFE IN AN EMERGENCY

You never think that you will be involved in a medical emergency but when it does happen to you, or someone close to you, you need to be prepared. Statistics show much better outcomes if the public, workers, etc. have had cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training and some preparedness for emergencies.

In Auckland, the average time it takes for a life support ambulance to reach a patient is 12 minutes. However, brain death starts at 4 minutes.

Survival in the community of a cardiac arrest is 6.4%. The longer a person is collapsed from a cardiac arrest without CPR, the more likely it is that they cannot be saved. Bystander CPR can double or triple the victim's chances of survival from a cardiac arrest. Early defibrillation (shocking the heart out of the abnormal heart rhythm) with a defibrillator plus CPR can increase survival to up to 75% according to which medical study you look at.

So what should you do to be prepared for an emergency?

The first thing you should do is help someone to save you. If you are the one that has collapsed or is in an accident, you should help your rescuers by having a Medic-Alert bracelet with or without an additional information card on your person if you have any health problems.

The health problems that are wise to be placed on a Medic-Alert would include drug allergies and medical conditions. Medic-Alert is an international organisation that produces internationally standardised medical bracelets and pendants for people with health conditions that are readily recognised by doctors and health workers internationally. If medical staff see that you have certain conditions like diabetes or heart disease when they see that you are collapsed, they will be getting a head start in your care.

If you are in a situation where you need to help somebody else, the first thing you do is call for help. The second thing you do is make sure that you do not become a victim of the circumstances. For example, 60% of all fatalities in a confined space like a mine are the rescuers. So often we hear that the person who drowned is the one that went to save someone. So when faced with an emergency where a rescue is needed, first look at the hazards that could be your own undoing. Another example is not to run back into a burning house.

But most accidents and tragedies happen in the home so you should constantly look out for any potential accidents. An example is if your elderly, unstable-on-her-feet, aunt is visiting, take up any of those loose rugs off the floor. Be aware of any potential dangers involved with your work or hobbies and prepare for them.

So, what about that medical emergency where someone has collapsed? There are two main things. The first is that knowing how to do CPR can save someone's life. This is especially useful because if you are someone with much public contact, e.g. teacher, shop worker, health worker etc, then you are at higher risk of encountering a collapse. If your spouse or a close family member has heart disease or has any condition at risk of a heart attack, it may also become useful.

You can enquire about how to do CPR at your local Red Cross or St Johns Ambulance.

Secondly, a new phenomenon that we are now seeing in public places is the automatic external defibrillator (AED). These are automatic cardiac shock machines popping up in shopping malls, garages and other public places and are designed for any member of the public to use.

AED's are a compact automated version of the ones you see on the medical show on TV that shocks the patient back to life when they have had a cardiac arrest. Once the pads are placed on the victim's chest, the machine can read the cardiac rhythm and advise you if you need to shock the person. It tells you to just push the shock button.

Researchers have found that CPR alone, while waiting for an ambulance, is not enough to save a life if there is a cardiac arrest. If a shock is given within the first 2-3 minutes of collapse there is a huge increase of survival. After a period of time without a shock the heart becomes harder and harder to shock back to normal.

So in summary, what you should do if there is an emergency is:

1. Save yourself by having a Medic- Alert bracelet if you need it.
2. Assess the hazards around the emergency and make sure you do not become a victim.
3. Call for help.
4. Start CPR while someone else sets up the AED.
5. When the AED says you need to shock then call "all clear" and push the shock button.

With all of this you are more likely to save a life when needed.