



First aid for drowning victims

Anoop Madhavan August 23, 2013 at 4:47 pm



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With the Uttarakhand floods still fresh in our minds, where hundreds of people perished and a large number were left stranded, it has become necessary to know about essentials when it comes to first aid and safety tips in the face of danger. We earlier wrote about basic CPR and EAR during an emergency situation, today we bring you tips on how to rescue a drowning victim and how to stay safe yourself during such a situation.

Here is an interview with the founder of Survival Instincts, [Mr Anoop Madhavan](#), who will tell you how to be prepared for different kinds of drowning situations:

Drowning in simple terms refers to the circumstance where a person in a water body is in a state of distress. It can happen to anyone and one needn't be a non-swimmer to suffer this

horrible fate. This is why it is recommended that everyone should wear a life jacket or a Type 3 Personal Floatation (PFD) whenever they are near a water body. This rule ensures that everyone, especially children, remain safe when they are near water and prevents any mishaps.

How do you save a drowning person?

If you see a person drowning, remember, **getting into the water is the last option**. Even a small child can pull down a well-trained adult swimmer when he/she struggles. It is best that one does not get into the water unless he/she is trained in water rescue procedures. If you are untrained, there is an important mantra you need to remember – reach, throw, row, but **don't go!** This means that one should not enter the water, unless necessary, to save a drowning person. Here is what you can do:

Reach: In this step, you try to extend something to the victim. It may be a long pole, or your hand. Here make sure you have a firm grip on something so that you do not get dragged into the water by the struggling victim.

Throw: In this step, you try to throw a rope, a buoy or a floatation device like a buoy, to the victim and haul the victim back to safety.

Row: This is mainly for people who are in a boat. It is important in the event someone falls off a boat, obviously here the method would be different when compared to if you were on land. If you are in a motor boat, the first thing to keep in mind is to switch off the engine. A running engine rotor blade could seriously injure the person in the water. Then row towards the victim and attempt to rescue him/her.

Remember – don't enter the water unless you are trained in rescue procedures!

Steps to save a drowning victim (for people trained in rescue procedures):



Step 1: The first step in a rescue procedure is to always to call for help. Use short words or phrases like HELP repeatedly instead of long sentences. If you have a safety whistle, give it three short beeps, indicating an emergency.

Step 2: The second step is to point in the direction of the victim, so others can also see where the victim is, in case you need assistance.

Step 3: In dire situations where no one else is around, enter the water with a floatation device (a rescue buoy or even a piece of thick foam) or something to extend to them like a stick. Never use rope during a rescue option while in the water because it can get entangled around you or the victim.

Step 4: Approach the victim cautiously and extend the floatation device to them without actually coming into physical proximity with the victim. This is to avoid the victim clinging on to you and possibly pulling you down with them. The aim of a rescue procedure is to keep the victim's head above the water at all times.

Once the victim has a strong hold of the rescue device, swim to shore. Alternatively if the victim stops struggling, hold him/her across the shoulders (to stabilize his/her head) and swim to shore. Once you reach shallow water, shore or land you can initiate resuscitation steps (if required).

How to rescue a victim who is below the water's surface:

Here the rescue is extremely difficult and should only be attempted by a trained person. If you are in such a position, you will need a rescue tube (usually found with lifeguards). The rescue tube is essential because one can extend the tube to the victim and then pull him/her to the surface. Attempting a rescue without a rescue tube, is physically challenging, but can be accomplished with good practice.

First aid after rescue is vital:

First aid is a very important part of the rescue. For every minute that the victim's not breathing or where his/her heart is not supplying oxygenated blood to the brain, the victim's chances of survival goes down by 10%.

The first step is to call for emergency medical step. Next you can go ahead and assess the victim's medical state.

If the victim's head has been above the water most of the time he/she may not be unconscious and will most probably be coughing. Coughing forcibly expels the water lodged in the windpipe. It's therefore always important in such cases to encourage the victim to cough until normal breathing is established. Once breathing is normal, you can care for minor injuries and monitor the victim for shock.

If the victim is unconscious, check for breathing. If they are, wait for medical help and monitor the victim till help arrives. Medical emergency workers require accurate information as to when the incident took place and how long the victim has been unconscious.

In case the victim is not breathing try to revive breathing by performing resuscitation, If the victim has no pulse you can start CPR(Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation) if there is no pulse.

(Read: [CPR or Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation: A step-by-step guide](#))

Follow the aforementioned steps to make sure that no innocent lives are lost due to ignorance. Always remember it's better to leave rescuing to professionals and if you're not trained you are more likely to do more harm than good.

Survival Instincts conducts lifeguard training for several 5 star hotels, including resuscitation using AEDs.