Choking Treatment

- Completing a first aid/CPR course is strongly advised before attempting these procedures and may be helpful if you are going to be in a remote wilderness situation for an extended period of time.

What to do if a person starts to choke:

- It is best not to do anything if the person is coughing forcefully and not turning a bluish color. Ask, "Are you choking?" If the person is able to answer you by speaking, it is a partial airway obstruction. Stay with the person and encourage him or her to cough until the obstruction is cleared.

- Do not give the person anything to drink because fluids may take up space needed for the passage of air.

Someone who cannot answer by speaking and can only nod the head has a complete airway obstruction and needs emergency help.

The treatment for a choking person who begins to turn blue or stops breathing varies with the person's age. In adults and children older than one year of age, abdominal thrusts (formerly referred to as the "Heimlich maneuver") should be attempted. This is a thrust that creates an artificial cough. It may be forceful enough to clear the airway. The quick, upward abdominal thrust forces the diaphragm upward very suddenly, making the chest cavity smaller. This has the effect of rapidly compressing the lungs and forcing air out. The rush of air out will force out whatever is causing the person to choke.

How to perform the abdominal thrusts

- Lean the person forward slightly and stand behind him or her. Make a fist with one hand. Put your arms around the person and grasp your fist with your other hand in the midline just below the ribs. Make a quick, hard movement inward and upward in an attempt to assist the person in coughing up the object. This maneuver should be repeated until the person is able to breathe or loses consciousness. (See diagram below.)
Heimlich Maneuver

1. Lean the person forward slightly and stand behind him or her.

2. Make a fist with one hand.

3. Put your arms around the person and grasp your fist with your other hand near the top of the stomach, just below the center of the rib cage.

4. Make a quick, hard movement inward and upward.

- If the person loses consciousness gently lay him or her flat on their back on the floor. To clear the airway, kneel next to the person and put the
heel of your hand against the middle of the abdomen, just below the ribs. Place your other hand on top and press inward and upward five times with both hands. If the airway clears and the person is still unresponsive, begin CPR.

- **In a wilderness situation where medical help is not readily available,** attempts to sweep the mouth clear of debris and rescue breathing may be considered. Repeat until the airway is clear.

- **Body fluid contact may be hazardous.** Use a barrier and wear gloves if available.

**Special Note:** The American Heart Association and the American Red Cross (the two main certifying bodies for teaching medical professionals and lay-people about first aid) differ on the initial treatment of conscious adults who are choking. The guidelines given above follow the American Heart Association recommendations. The American Red Cross guidelines include five back blows on conscious adults prior to abdominal thrusts. This has been a controversial topic in the field of choking treatment for many years. There is scientific evidence for and against back blows as initial treatment in adults. For more information on this treatment variation please consult the American Red Cross website.

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