

CREW HEALTH ADVICE

Life saving actions for minor injuries

Burns are injuries to the skin which can be caused by several hazards in the workplace such as heat, cold, chemicals, friction, electricity and radiation.

The severity of burn is graded according to the depth of the injury through this skin – skin changes may take a while to occur in the early stages, and can be difficult to judge hence why it's important to seek help as early as possible.

The main risks associated with burns include wound site or bloodstream infection, and significant dehydration if affecting a large proportion of your body – both have the potential to lead to death.

The action to take after sustaining a burn – especially in the workplace, is to seek medical help early – no matter how trivial it looks.

Immediate life saving actions for burns

- Remove the source/cause of the burn (if possible).
- Place injury under cool water for 10–30 minutes. Avoid direct contact with ice.
- Place layers of cling film on the wound or a plastic bag if a hand or foot.
- Keep patient warm, take pain killers, seek help.

Fractures and dislocations

A fracture is a break in any of the bones of the body. A dislocation is abnormal positioning of a joint usually associated with damage to the ligaments and tissues that hold the joint together. Both are caused by significant force such as a fall from height or injury from a hard tool or item. The most common fractures we see are fingers, wrists and ankles.

Dislocations are usually fairly obvious, however fractures can sometimes be difficult to diagnose (even on XRays in some occasions). The main immediate risk of fractures can be significant blood

loss from large bones or associated injuries of the surrounding tissues (nerve, muscle, artery damage) which may appear as swelling, numbness or a cool limb. This also may not be immediately obvious.

Poor treatment of fractures and dislocations can lead to significant loss of function and ongoing pain for the longer term, hence why it's important to seek help early.

Immediate life saving actions for fractures and/or dislocations

- If a wound is present, control any obvious bleeding with direct pressure.
- Immobilise the injury by keeping it supported – this reduces the risk of movement causing further pain and/or injury and bleeding.
- Keep warm, take pain killers, seek help.

If the injured person appears to be very unwell, do not delay with the actions above and seek medical help as soon as possible.

Joint swellings

Similar to the above, in a trauma scenario, the underlying cause is usually a fracture, dislocation or bleeding and soft tissue swelling within the joint. The most common joint swellings we see are knees, ankles and wrists.

In these situations, it is important to follow the **RICE acronym – Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation** and seek medical help.

These injuries can take a long time to heal depending on the underlying injury, hence it's important not to aggravate it (e.g. using the affected limb) which can prolong the healing process.

Cuts/grazes/bruises

Cuts and grazes refer to penetrating or friction injuries of the skin – severity is highly variable depending on cause of injury. A bruise is discolouration of the skin caused by bleeding beneath the surface.



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The vast majority of the time these do not need urgent medical help, however in a workplace scenario, it is prudent to get all injuries reviewed by medical personnel due to risk of infection or other possible associated injuries which may not always be apparent.

Immediate life saving actions for cuts and grazes

- Clean the wound with clean running water (drinking water quality).
- Dry the wound and use a dressing to cover it – ensure the dressing does not stick directly on the wound as this will damage the skin.
- Seek a medical review.

Back pain

Approximately 80% of people will experience back pain in their lives. It is a very common complaint with rarely a serious underlying cause.

Back pain due to trauma should always be investigated due to concerns of injury to the spine which may cause problems with the functioning of the nerves supplying various parts of the body including the lower limbs, bladder and bowels.

Immediate life saving actions for back pain due to trauma

- Ensure the area is safe and the risk of further harm is reduced.
- Do not move the injured person (unless risk of further harm persists), however attempt to keep the affected part of the body immobilised (if possible).
- Keep the person warm.
- Seek medical help immediately – ideally to come to the location of the injured person.

Head injuries

Head injuries can be serious due to the risk of hidden bleeding beneath the skull resulting in loss of consciousness and death – this can happen over several hours or sometimes days. The chances of



this occurring are higher in situations where there is significant force, and/or the individual is intrinsically vulnerable to injury due to pre-existing health conditions causing thinning of the bones or blood.

Symptoms and signs associated with a head injury include confusion dizziness, nausea, loss of consciousness, headache, loss of recent memory and scalp wounds.

Scalp wounds can bleed profusely resulting in a significant loss of blood if not controlled, hence it's important that direct pressure is applied to the area as soon as possible. You may need to use several packs of gauze or other material to achieve this in addition to applying direct manual pressure.

Immediate life saving actions for head injuries

- Ensure the area is safe and the risk of further harm is reduced
- Check **AVPU** –
 - **Alert** – Are they alert, eyes open and responding to questions?

- **Voice** – If not alert or eyes open, do they respond to questions or following instructions?
- **Pain** – If not – if you pinch them gently, or press hard on a part of their body, do they open their eyes, withdraw or respond accordingly?
- **Unresponsive** – If you shake gently, do they respond at all? If unresponsive, assess their airway and breathing if you feel competent to do so.
- Seek medical help immediately and communicate your findings. If you are waiting for help to arrive, it's important to repeat the AVPU checks at regular intervals as the situation can deteriorate quite rapidly.
- Assess for bleeding from scalp wounds and apply direct pressure if appropriate.

This advice was compiled in collaboration with Red Square Medical, who offer a full range of maritime medical services, from training and consultancy services, right through to mass casualty incident planning and training.

www.redsquaremedical.com

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The Club was the first to launch a crew health scheme in 1996 due to increasing crew illness claims and a lack of accountability of clinics. Since 1996, the Crew Health programme has become one of the Club's leading loss prevention initiatives. The aim of the programme is to reduce the volume and value of crew illness claims which are caused by a pre-existing illnesses or disease. These underlying conditions often impact on the crew member's fitness for service and can endanger not only the health of the seafarer but also the onboard safety of other crew.

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Sophia joined Thomas Miller in 1992 and from 1994 worked as a claims handler dealing mainly with French and Spanish Members. In 2004, Sophia became the Crew Health Programme Director. Sophia has undertaken a large number of clinic audits, implemented the standard medical

form and clinic guidelines. She has also lead the scheme through the largest period of growth and development with a doubling of approved clinic facilities and a four fold member increase. Sophia is a Director of Thomas Miller & Co. Ltd.

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Saidul Alom joined Crew Health from the European Region Service Team in 2004. Saidul provides administrative support to the Crew Health programme and is responsible for liaison with the approved clinics on financial billing matters and ensuring prompt payment of all clinic fees.

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Stuart joined Thomas Miller in 1998 as a claims trainee for UK P&I Club's Greek Members. In April 2005 Stuart joined Crew Health as the Team Administrator. Stuart is responsible for co-ordination of Member entries and administration for the clinic approval process.