

Caregiving for someone who is seriously or chronically ill is a daunting task, and an emergency can be frightening. Taking steps in advance will help you handle a crisis, should one occur.

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Caregiving can be a demanding and intimidating responsibility, especially when you know the person you are taking care of might one day be facing a medical emergency. Should that happen, the situation will go more smoothly for you as the caregiver and for your loved one if you're prepared in advance and know exactly what you'll need to have handy and what steps you'll need to take.

5 Basics Steps to Emergency Preparedness

Basic training and first aid supplies will go a long way toward giving you a greater comfort level as a caregiver:

1. Take a CPR class. You can use CPR to revive someone whose heart has stopped beating or who has stopped breathing. Bill Guerra, RN, BSN, of the Seven Hills Surgery Center in Henderson, Nev., recommends that all caregivers take a CPR class so you understand the ABCs of emergency response: A (airway), B (breathing), and C (circulation).

2. Learn the Heimlich maneuver. CPR training also involves learning the Heimlich maneuver — how to clear someone's airway in the event a foreign object or food becomes lodged in the throat. Attempting the Heimlich maneuver without proper training can injure your loved one. Visit the [American Heart Association Web site](#) to learn about the Heimlich maneuver and [where to take a CPR class](#). Also, find more on the warning signs of [heart attack](#) and [stroke](#).

3. Maintain a well-stocked first aid kit. Thoroughly read the manual as soon as you buy your first aid kit. Check monthly to make certain you have adequate supplies, and replace any items that may have expired. An ear thermometer may be the best choice if your loved one might accidentally bite down on an oral thermometer. Keep a second first aid kit in your car; keep both out of the reach of children.

4. Create a medical provider list and keep copies handy. “Always have all doctors’ numbers in a central, convenient place; put one copy of the list in your purse or wallet and one on the refrigerator. Include a list of all medications and other health facts and conditions. Make another list of family members to notify,” says Guerra. When applicable, have phone numbers of people who can watch your children or pets and secure your home, should you need to take your loved one to the emergency room.

5. Buy an automatic blood pressure cuff. You can buy a good one at any local drug store. Learn how to use it and practice using it regularly. On regular doctor visits, take the cuff with you to check its accuracy against the physician’s blood pressure monitor and to ensure you are using it correctly.

4 Steps to Take in an Emergency Situation

Keeping your wits about you will be key, should an emergency arise. Practice these steps so that you’ll know exactly what to do in an emergency:

1. Assess the situation. Is your loved one bleeding or did he have a blow to the head, a fall, or an allergic reaction? Is he experiencing any symptom specifically related to his illness? What were you both doing just prior to the emergency? Is he responsive? Are his pupils enlarged and are they the same size? Was there a complaint of pain or anything else relevant? What is different or unusual about your loved one? “Observe, observe, observe,” says Guerra in anticipation of calling 911.

2. Call 911. Do this when you have the even slightest hint that your loved one is facing a life-threatening emergency. “A call to 911 is the best thing in any emergency,” says Guerra. Do not attempt to take anyone with a potentially serious problem to the hospital yourself; instead, call 911 immediately. Give the 911 operator as much information as you can, so that emergency personnel can be fully prepared to assist your loved one when they arrive, says Guerra. It’s crucial to accurately describe the situation and speak slowly and clearly when talking with the 911 operator. Mention any pre-existing conditions, such as a history of heart attack, diabetes, a bleeding disorder, or asthma.

3. Loosen any tight clothing. Make sure your loved one has nothing constricting the airways, like a restrictive shirt or tie, and keep them in a comfortable position while you wait for help.

4. Comfort and communicate. Talk to your loved one until 911 arrives. Guerra recommends that you keep your loved one awake by talking to them, but don’t encourage them to talk. Take slow, deep breaths to help yourself stay calm as well.

For a caregiver, an emergency can be both alarming and frightening, but when you're prepared, you can make a tremendous difference in your loved one's well-being.