

Is it an emergency?

Sometimes it's difficult to tell. But according to Drs. Donald Vickery and James Fries, it's certainly an emergency if it falls into any of these 10 categories:

- 1 Major injury.** Rely on your common sense: Things like broken legs and large chest wounds deserve immediate care.
- 2 Unconsciousness.** If a person is unconscious, get medical help immediately.
- 3 Active bleeding.** A wound that continues to bleed despite the application of direct pressure must be treated to prevent excessive loss of blood. The average adult can lose several cups of blood without any ill effect; a child tolerates loss of smaller amounts. In a small child, if you cannot control a nosebleed, go to the emergency room immediately.
- 4 Stupor or drowsiness.** If a patient is not alert enough to say what happened to him, get medical care. A child who cannot be aroused needs immediate attention.
- 5 Disorientation.** Often a part of many illnesses, it's common with a high fever. But a previously alert person who suddenly doesn't know time, place or identity needs immediate attention.
- 6 Shortness of breath.** In young adults, the most frequent cause of shortness of breath while resting is hyperventilation. But if it cannot be confidently determined this is the cause, get medical help.
- 7 Cold sweats.** The common response to high fever and stress, the cold sweat as an isolated symptom is usually not serious. But in presence of chest pain, abdominal pain or lightheadedness, it signals the need for immediate medical help.
- 8 Severe pain.** Relief of severe pain may call for emergency care even if the cause of the pain is found to be inconsequential.
- 9 Poisoning.** All cases of poisoning need medical treatment. Be prepared to tell what the poison is and how much was swallowed.
- 10 Seizures, convulsion.** A seizure after a head injury requires medical help. Seizures may also occur during an attack of measles or other diseases such as chicken pox or mumps. They may last two to three minutes, during which time the person should not be restrained.

