

Rescuing an Unconscious Diver

The worst-case scenario in diver rescue is finding your buddy unconscious underwater. This situation is unlikely, but you still need to be prepared for it.

When rescuing an unconscious diver time is of the essence. No matter how you attempt the rescue, the most important thing to do is get the victim to the surface and begin resuscitation. First aid cannot be administered underwater. In this situation, panic on your part could be deadly. You must remain mentally alert and physically capable. You must also remember that any time you feel that you are in danger, you should stop until you feel it is safe to continue.



Skills Needed to Rescue an Unconscious Diver

If you find a diver unconscious underwater, assume there is some chance for survival and proceed accordingly. You will not have much time to think once you discover your buddy, so you must be ready to act immediately. First, remember to stay in control and prevent panic in yourself. Listed below are skills you should mentally rehearse in order to be prepared for this situation.

1. All buddy rescue skills including searching for a missing diver
2. Bringing an unconscious diver to the surface
3. Handling an unconscious buddy on the surface

4. Transporting an unconscious buddy to boat or shore
5. Getting an unconscious buddy onto the boat or shore

Bringing an Unconscious Buddy to the Surface

When bringing your buddy to the surface, you need to do it as quickly as possible. Use positive buoyancy to get both you and the victim to the surface. By using buoyancy, you decrease your chance of becoming fatigued. Dragging a victim while ascending can be physically exhausting.

One method is to remove the unconscious diver's weights, then control the ascent with your buoyancy compensator. This allows you to let the victim free-float to the surface if you must let go to control yourself or your rate of ascent.

Handling an Unconscious Buddy on the Surface

When you arrive at the surface, achieve positive buoyancy for both of you. Conserve your energy for your return to the boat or shore. Again, stay in mental control, using deep breathing to relax.

Immediately check the victim's ABCs: open the victim's Airway, check for Breathing, and check the Circulation to see if a pulse is present. All of these indicators will help determine how fast you must work and how quickly you'll need to get outside help.

If you are wearing gloves, remove them before checking for vital signs, and if you are wearing a dry suit with seals at the wrists, your sense of feeling may not be delicate enough to detect a pulse.



Transporting an Unconscious Buddy to the Shore or Boat

The decision on how long to spend helping your buddy in the water should be based on his/ her vital signs.

If the victim has no pulse or heartbeat, it is pointless to attempt any in-water resuscitation. You should get the victim out of the water as quickly as possible so you can perform adequate CPR.



As discussed earlier in this book, in-water CPR is inefficient and even dangerous. Immediate care will help sustain the victim but is no substitute for evacuation to an emergency medical facility. Time is of the essence.

If the victim is not breathing but has a pulse, your decision on your level of care will be based on your distance from the shore or boat. Perform rescue breathing by opening the airway and giving the victim two quick breaths before you begin the trip to the shore or boat. If you have a long way to swim and you were not able to restore breathing, continue to give the victim one breath every five seconds until you reach safety. This procedure will of course be easier with the help of another diver.

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