



Chapter 6. Part 3. Poisoning and Overdose

Chapter 6: Handling Medical Emergencies

Part 3: Poisoning and Overdose

(Recognizing and managing accidental or intentional exposure to toxic substances)

1. What Is Poisoning?

Poisoning occurs when a harmful substance enters the body and interferes with its normal function. This can happen by:

- **Ingestion** - swallowing (e.g., household cleaners, spoiled food, drugs)
- **Inhalation** - breathing toxic fumes (e.g., carbon monoxide, gas leaks)
- **Injection** - via needle or bite/sting (e.g., drugs, venom)
- **Absorption** - through skin or eyes (e.g., pesticides, chemicals)

2. Types of Poisoning and Their Signs

A. Chemical Poisoning (Household or Industrial)

Examples: bleach, toilet cleaner, insecticides, acids

Signs:

- Burns around mouth/lips
- Vomiting, abdominal pain
- Breathing difficulty (if inhaled)
- Altered consciousness

B. Food Poisoning

Causes: contaminated food or water

Signs:

- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea
- Abdominal cramps
- Fever, weakness
- Dehydration (dry mouth, low urine)

C. Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Cause: inhaling fumes from faulty heaters, vehicles in closed spaces

Signs:



- Headache, dizziness
- Confusion, blurred vision
- Cherry-red skin (in later stages)
- Loss of consciousness

D. Drug or Medication Overdose

Causes: excessive prescription drugs, recreational drugs, self-harm

Signs:

- Slow or no breathing
- Drowsiness or coma
- Small or enlarged pupils
- Seizures
- Abnormal heart rate

3. General First Aid for Poisoning

First Rule: Never induce vomiting unless advised by a medical professional or poison control center.

A. Steps to Follow:

1. **Check safety** – make sure the area is safe for you.
2. **Call emergency services (112)** immediately.
3. **Try to identify the poison:**
 - Check bottles, labels, pills, or smell.
 - If possible, take a sample to the hospital.
4. **Check the person's response:**
 - Are they awake?
 - Are they breathing?
 - Any seizures?

B. If Poison Was Swallowed (Ingested)

- Do NOT give water, milk, or anything by mouth unless instructed.
- Do NOT induce vomiting.
- Place the person on their side if drowsy or vomiting (recovery position).
- Save vomit sample for hospital analysis.

C. If Poison Was Inhaled

- Move the person to **fresh air** immediately.
- Loosen tight clothing.
- Watch for breathing; start CPR if needed.
- Avoid breathing in the fumes yourself.

D. If Poison Was on Skin or Eyes

- Remove contaminated clothing carefully.
- Rinse skin or eyes with **clean running water** for 15–20 minutes.
- Use gloves to avoid spreading it to yourself.

4. First Aid for Drug Overdose

Overdose can be **accidental (e.g., double dose)** or **intentional (self-harm or substance abuse)**

A. What to Look For:

- **Opioids** (e.g., heroin, morphine): slow breathing, pinpoint pupils, unresponsive
- **Stimulants** (e.g., cocaine): agitation, high pulse, seizures
- **Sedatives** (e.g., sleeping pills): drowsy, unconscious, slow breathing
- **Alcohol overdose**: vomiting, confusion, slow pulse, cold skin

B. First Aid Steps for Overdose:

1. **Call 112 immediately**
2. **Check breathing and pulse**
 - If absent → **start CPR**
3. **Place in recovery position** if unconscious but breathing
4. **Do not leave the person alone**
5. **Do not give anything by mouth**
6. **Look for containers, pill bottles**—hand them to medical team

If trained and **naloxone (Narcan)** is available (for opioids), administer it as per local laws and instructions.

5. Important “Do NOTs”

- Do not give water or food to unconscious victims
- Do not try to neutralise acids or alkalis with other substances
- Do not delay in calling for professional help
- Do not assume the person is asleep—act fast

6. Prevention Tips

- Keep all medicines and chemicals **locked away** from children.
- Label containers clearly—never store chemicals in food bottles.
- Never share prescription medications.
- Install **carbon monoxide detectors** at home.



7. Self-Check Questions

1. What is the most important first step in any poisoning emergency?
2. Name two signs of opioid overdose.
3. Should you induce vomiting in chemical poisoning?
4. What position is safest for an unconscious person who is breathing?
5. Which type of poisoning is associated with small pupils and slow breathing?
 1. Call emergency services (112)
 2. Pinpoint pupils, slow breathing, unconsciousness
 3. No – never induce vomiting unless told to
 4. Recovery position (on the side)
 5. Opioid overdose

□ Key Take-Home Points

- **Poisoning can enter the body through mouth, nose, skin, or injection.**
- **Identify, do not guess**—the type of poison determines the treatment.
- Always **call emergency services first**, then provide safe and appropriate care.
- Never give anything orally to an unconscious person or try home remedies.
- When in doubt, **protect the airway and keep the person safe until help arrives.**