



Checklist for the Examination of an Unconscious Athlete

Primary Survey

As with any emergency situation, you should begin your examination with a primary survey:

- ☐ Attempt to arouse athlete; call name
- ☐ Check airway (cervical spine precautions)
- ☐ Check breathing (look, listen, feel)
- ☐ Check circulation
- ☐ Check for severe bleeding
- ☐ Use spinal precautions throughout until you can rule out cervical spine injury

Secondary Survey

If you rule out the need to call EMS, you may proceed to your secondary survey:

History

Try to obtain from bystanders or the surroundings as much information as possible about the following:

- ☐ The cause (trauma or no apparent trauma)
- ☐ Whether loss of consciousness was gradual or rapid in onset
- ☐ Duration of unconsciousness
- ☐ Level of consciousness or behavior prior to loss of consciousness
- ☐ Any complaints made by the athlete prior to losing consciousness
- ☐ Any medical history that might have contributed to the loss of consciousness

Observation and Inspection

- ☐ Note position of head, neck, and extremities for deformities
- ☐ Note any unusual body posturing (decerebrate or decorticate rigidity)
- ☐ Note presence of seizure and take appropriate action to protect the athlete
- ☐ Determine presence of and note any irregularities in rate, depth, and rhythm of respirations
- ☐ Inspect skin for temperature, color, and moisture
- ☐ Check pupils for size, equality, and reaction to light

- ☐ Check mouth for bleeding (seizures) or unusual odors (diabetes)
- ☐ Inspect for swelling, deformity, or discoloration around the head, neck, or scalp
- ☐ Inspect for otorrhea and rhinorrhea
- ☐ Inspect for swelling, deformity, or discoloration of the chest wall, trunk, and abdomen
- ☐ Inspect for swelling, deformity, or discoloration of the extremities

Palpation

- ☐ Determine presence, rate, and strength of pulse
- ☐ Record blood pressure
- ☐ Palpate head, neck, and scalp for deformity, crepitus, and swelling
- ☐ Palpate chest, trunk, and extremities for deformity, crepitus, and swelling
- ☐ Palpate abdomen for distension and muscle rigidity

Determine Level of Unconsciousness (Glasgow Coma Scale)

Does the athlete exhibit any of the following:

- ☐ Drowsiness (athlete is aroused by verbal stimuli)
- ☐ Stupor (athlete is aroused by painful stimuli such as a pinch to the trapezius or inner arm or thigh)
- ☐ Coma (no response to any stimulus, verbal or painful)
- ☐ Functional Tests
- ☐ None

Referral

Refer the athlete when any of the following occurs:

- ☐ Athlete does not regain consciousness
- ☐ Cause for unconsciousness cannot be determined even if consciousness is regained
- ☐ Any abnormal vital signs are present
- ☐ Any positive signs are noted on exam