

# How to treat a casualty

## with a suspected spinal injury

If you need to respond to a casualty that you suspect has spinal injuries, it is essential that you take particular care to minimise any movement to their back or neck.

The NHS advises that you do not attempt to move them and instead wait for the emergency services to arrive. Instead, you should support their body to ensure it is kept still, open their airway if they are unresponsive, and carefully perform CPR if they are unresponsive and not breathing normally.

To assist a casualty with a suspected spinal injury:

- 1 Reassure them and tell them to keep still unless they're in immediate danger, such as due to a fire.
- 2 Immediately call 999 or 112 for emergency assistance (or get someone to call them while you move to the next stage as quickly as possible).
- 3 Immobilise movement to prevent further damage by keeping their spine, neck, and head still and stopping their head from moving. Support the casualty's head by kneeling behind them, resting your elbows on your knees or on the ground and placing your spread fingers at each side of their head above their ears.
- 4 If someone else is present, get them to cushion the casualty's head by placing rolled-up blankets, towels, or clothes on either side, while you maintain your supportive hold on their head.
- 5 If the casualty is unresponsive, place your fingertips at either side of their jaw and gently lift it upwards towards you to open their airway; this is known as the jaw thrust technique. Take care not to move their neck as you do so. If they're breathing normally, continue to support the casualty's head and monitor their responsiveness and breathing until help arrives.
- 6 If the casualty is unresponsive and not breathing normally, you must start CPR immediately, taking care not to move their head, neck or back as you do so. Do not tilt the casualty's head backwards. Their mouth should already be open at this stage as you will have opened their airway.



When treating a casualty with a suspected spinal injury, you must take care to move their body as little as possible and never move their neck, as this could cause further harm.