



First Aid

for Underwater Divers with “Bends”

**A collaborative Publication of the
Sri Lanka Medical Association and the Directorate of
Health Services of the Sri Lanka Navy**

This document has been prepared for the use of SCUBA divers, boatmen and others, including life savers, who may be called upon to care for a diver with *bends*. It is very important that first aid care should commence as soon as a diving-related condition is suspected—therefore other occupants of the dive boat used by the victim should be familiar with these recommendations. The only effective recommended treatment is with oxygen at high pressure in a recompression chamber. **This form of treatment is available only through the Navy Hospital in Trincomalee.** If it is not possible to enter this hospital as soon as possible, patients should be admitted to the nearest hospital for necessary preliminary treatment until arrangements can be made to enter the Navy Hospital.

FIRST AID FOR DIVERS WITH *BENDS*

1. Keep lying flat;
2. Recovery position (left lateral) if unconscious;
3. Reassure, encourage to keep calm and still;
4. Protect against cold, remove wet clothes;
5. Encourage plenty of non-alcoholic fluids by mouth if fully conscious;
6. Carry victim from the boat to shore and keep lying flat;
7. Use a tight-fitting mask to provide 100% oxygen in spells of 20 minutes, with 5 minutes on air in between, starting as soon as possible;
8. Admit to the Navy Hospital, Trincomalee **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**—ring 0262 261868 or 0262 266100 to arrange admission for chamber treatment, otherwise admit to a nearby hospital;
9. Inform the doctor/hospital staff that symptoms are likely to result from diving too deep for too long.

DO NOT ADMINISTER OXYGEN UNDERWATER

Hospital treatment while awaiting high pressure oxygen therapy consists of: insertion of a urinary catheter if the patient is unable to pass urine, administering intravenous saline and continuing 100% oxygen through a tight-fitting (anaesthetic type) face-mask—in spells of 20 minutes O₂ interrupted by 5 minutes breathing air.

Someone who can describe the dive profile—number of cylinders used, time at bottom, surface intervals—and time interval between surfacing and onset of symptoms as well as what was done afterwards should accompany the patient—especially to the Navy Hospital

Common symptoms of *BENDS*

(Decompression Sickness or DCS)

Joint or back pains ♦ Numbness ♦ Altered sensation ♦ Weakness ♦ Tingling in extremities ♦ Nausea ♦ Loss of balance ♦ Skin rash ♦ Visual disturbances ♦ Undue fatigue ♦ Urinary retention



BENDS HELP HOTLINE

Need advice? Answers to questions?

Ring one of the following at any time:

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