

# How to Give First Aid for a Severed Finger

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Reviewed

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A severed (amputated) finger is a very serious injury. When you first arrive on the scene, though, you need to make sure the person doesn't have a more serious injury. After that, your priorities are stemming the bleeding and saving the finger for reattachment.

Method  
1

## Taking First Steps

- 1 Look around the area for danger.** Before helping someone, make sure you do not see anything that would put you or others in immediate danger, such as a power tool that is still on.<sup>[1]</sup>
- 2 Check for consciousness.** See if the person is awake enough to talk to you. You can start by asking for the person's name.<sup>[2]</sup>
  - If the person isn't conscious, that could be a sign of a more serious injury or shock.
- 3 Call for help.** If you're the only person in the area, call 911 to get help. If other people are around, assign one person to call 911.<sup>[3]</sup>
- 4 Check for more serious injuries.** A severed finger can be distracting with all the blood, but make sure that is the most serious injury before moving on to treat it. For instance, check for more serious bleeding wounds.<sup>[4]</sup>
- 5 Continue talking to the person.** Help her remain calm by talking to her in a soothing voice. Try not to become panicked yourself. Take slow, deep breaths, and ask the injured person to do the same.<sup>[5]</sup>

Method  
2

## Applying First Aid

- 1 Put on gloves.** If they are quickly available, put on gloves before helping the person. Gloves will help protect you from any blood-borne diseases he may have. First aid kits sometimes include gloves.<sup>[6]</sup>
- 2 Clean off the dirt.** If you see any clear pieces of dirt or debris on the wound, you can remove it by rinsing with clean, running water (you can pour this from a water bottle if a sink is not accessible). However, if you see an imbedded object or something large, leave it where it is.<sup>[7]</sup>
- 3 Keep the wound from bleeding more.** Using clean cloth or gauze, press down on the wounded area. Try to staunch the flow of blood with pressure.<sup>[8]</sup>
- 4 Elevate the wound.** Make sure the hand with the severed finger is above the heart, as the elevation will help slow down the bleeding.<sup>[9]</sup>
- 5 Have the person lay down.** Help her lay down, using blanket or carpeting under her to keep her warm.<sup>[10]</sup>
- 6 Continue to apply pressure.** While the wound is still bleeding, keep holding down the wound. If you become tired, ask someone else to take over. If you don't seem to be stopping the blood at all, make sure you have the wound properly covered.<sup>[11]</sup>
  - If you cannot continue to apply pressure, you can put on a tight bandage. However, tight bandages can cause

harm over time.<sup>[12]</sup> To apply one, wrap a piece of cloth or gauze around the wound, and use tape to keep it on.<sup>[13]</sup>

- Keep the pressure on until help arrives.

Method  
3

### Saving the Finger

- 1 Clean the finger.** Lightly wash off the finger to clean off dirt, especially if the wound on it looks dirty.<sup>[14]</sup>
  - Have someone else do these steps if you are still applying pressure.
- 2 Remove jewelry.** If possible, gently take off any rings or other jewelry. They may be more difficult to take off later.<sup>[15]</sup>
- 3 Wrap the finger in a damp paper towel or gauze.** Lightly wet a clean paper towel with sterile saline solution if available (contact lens solution can be used), or tap or bottled water if saline is not available. Wring out any excess liquid. Wrap the finger in the towel.<sup>[16]</sup>
- 4 Place the finger in a plastic bag.** Set the wrapped finger in a zip-top bag. Zip up the bag.<sup>[17]</sup>
- 5 Make an ice bag or bucket.** In a larger zip-top bag or a bucket, add ice and water. Place the zipped finger bag into the larger bag.<sup>[18]</sup>
  - Do not place the finger directly in water or ice, as it will get frostbitten and damage the skin. Also, don't use dry ice, as that is too cold.<sup>[19]</sup>
- 6 Hand the finger to the paramedics.** Once help arrives, let them take control of the finger.

## Community Q&A

### Should put the severed finger in milk?



No, definitely not! It is not cold enough to save the finger and the person may have an allergy to it.

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## Tips

- A finger that has been placed in cold water or ice (the finger should be in a sealed ziplock bag) can remain viable for 18 hours; without cooling, it can only be used within four to six hours.<sup>[20]</sup> If you can't put it into cold water, at least keep it away from heat.

## Warnings

- Saving the person is more important than saving the person's finger; always attend to the person first.
- This is a serious injury. Notify emergency services immediately.

## Sources and Citations

1. [http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/first\\_aid\\_basics?open](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/first_aid_basics?open)
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