FIELD GUIDE · NO. 17

Tourniquet Placement

For life-threatening bleeding from an arm or leg when direct pressure cannot control it.



FROM THE BOOK

1. Make sure the scene is safe, and put on disposable gloves if they are available, before you come into contact with blood. Call emergency services as early as possible — do not delay the call while you search for supplies.
2. For most severe bleeding, direct pressure is the first and most effective treatment. A commercially manufactured tourniquet is for life-threatening bleeding from an arm or leg when direct pressure cannot control it or cannot be maintained.
3. Place the tourniquet about two to three inches above the wound, and never directly over a joint. Tighten it until the bleeding stops, not merely until it becomes uncomfortable. Secure the windlass according to the manufacturer's instructions.
4. Once a tourniquet has been applied correctly, do not loosen or remove it as a bystander. Record the time it was applied — on the tourniquet or on the patient's skin, if appropriate — and give that time to emergency responders.
5. Do not apply a tourniquet to the neck or torso, where it cannot be used safely. Do not pack random materials into a wound unless you have been trained to use proper wound-packing techniques and supplies.
6. Most everyday injuries, even those that bleed freely at first, respond well to direct pressure and a dressing. Knowing when a tourniquet is needed is as important as knowing how to apply one. Watch for signs of shock (pale skin, cool extremities, rapid breathing, weakness, or confusion), keep the person warm, and turn care over to emergency medical personnel as soon as possible.

PRACTICE IT

If you have not already, take a certified first-aid or bleeding-control course and practice applying a commercial tourniquet on a training limb or with an instructor — not as a substitute for calling emergency services.

Educational reference only. Not a substitute for certified first-aid training or professional medical care. In a life-threatening emergency, contact local emergency services as soon as it is safe to do so. Use this information only within the limits of your training.