

WHAT IS AGONAL BREATHING?

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The resuscitation changes emphasise the importance of chest compressions and recognising normal breathing. The word 'agonal' means pertaining to or associated with agony (especially death agonies). Agonal breathing is a term used to describe 'gasps' of breath by a casualty with Sudden Cardiac Arrest.

This happens in up to 40% of victims for a few minutes after SCA and is often confused with 'normal' or 'noisy' breathing. The breaths are at intervals of more than 10 seconds and it is a sign that CPR should be initiated immediately (once an ambulance has been called). For this reason, if you are in any doubt about if your casualty is breathing or not breathing assume not and commence CPR immediately. Research shows that when a casualty collapses with SCA their lungs are, at that time, well oxygenated. The priority now is to get some of that oxygenated blood to the brain and heart which is why CPR is commenced with chest compressions.

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