

UNCONSCIOUS PATIENT

Physical examination	Characteristics	Score
Eye opening	Never	1
	To pain	2
	To verbal stimuli	3
	Spontaneous	4
Best verbal response	No response	1
	Incomprehensible sounds	2
	Inappropriate words	3
	Disoriented and converses	4
	Oriented and converses	5
Best motor response	None	1
	Extensor posturing	2
	Flexor posturing	3
	Localized pain	4
	Obeys	5

Glasgow Coma Score (GCS)

A part of the brainstem, called the reticular activating system keeps a patient conscious. If it is damaged by a blocked blood vessel, bleeding, or the brain twisting after a blow to the head, a patient becomes unconscious.

The other way to become unconscious is to stop both cerebral hemispheres functioning. This can happen if they lack blood flow, lack oxygen or sugar, are influenced by drugs or toxic gases, are damaged by toxic wastes from liver disease, or are recovering after a seizure.

It is difficult for a lesion affecting only one side of the brain, such as a stroke, tumour or haematoma, to cause unconsciousness unless there is so much swelling that the rest of the brain is squashed.

Scenario

An 'Emergency call' comes in from a work shop where a 60 year old manual worker has collapsed. Nobody witnessed the event, but had been seen to be performing his usual duties ten minutes earlier. He is breathing regularly, but his eyes are shut and he is not moving.

Task

Some of you will be asked to tackle a similar practice scenario this month.

Discuss your approach with your colleagues before then.



Question

What features would make you suspect that the patient had suffered an unwitnessed fit?

Step-by-step

- ★ **Look for danger, call for help**
- ★ **Check response. Alert, responds to Voice, responds to Pain, Unresponsive (AVPU). Record the GCS later, if you have time.**
- ★ **Check and open airway. Roll into recovery position. Keep the cervical spine straight if trauma has not been excluded.**
- ★ **Check breathing and circulation. If needed, start CPR. Apply 8 l/min oxygen. Monitor pulse, and blood pressure if possible.**
- ★ **Check disability by looking at pupils, and pinching fingers and toes. Note if one side is different from the other.**
- ★ **Check blood sugar. Don't Ever Forget Glucose (abcDEFG). Give 25 ml of intravenous 50 % glucose if low.**
- ★ **Look for clues suggesting a fall, fit, drug use, diabetes, or preceding illness.**
- ★ **Do not leave patient unattended.**