

CBS This Morning, July 16, 1993

Twenty-three minutes before the hour. Dr. Howard Torman coming up next.

PAULA ZAHN, co-host:

We're back now. No one ever expects to have to deal with a drowning and be called upon to give first aid. But now our Dr. Howard Torman tells us there is a controversy brewing over the right way to save a drowning victim. Good morning.

Dr. HOWARD TORMAN reporting:

Yeah, and you know, ironically it's a name that's synonymous at saving lives. And at the center of this controversy is good old Dr. Henry Heimlich. You know, if you happen to be around when someone--maybe it's a family member, maybe it's the kid next door is pulled out of the water, not breathing, unconscious, what would you do? What should you do?

Mr. JACK BAKER: I jumped in. I didn't know it was that deep. She wasn't breathing at all.

TORMAN: Landscapers Jack Baker and Todd Shebor never thought about being heroes when they pulled a drowning 8-year-old girl out of a Cincinnati pool.

correct spelling: SCHEBOR

Mr. TODD SHEBOR: The first thing I did is I asked Jack, I said, 'I should give her the Heimlich.' And he says, 'Do anything, she--she's dying. She can't breath.' So I picked her up. On the third try, I told myself I'm either going to break this poor little girl's ribs or--or she's going to cough something up. And I gave her the third jolt.

Mr. BAKER: You could hear the--the gush. Yeah, just like a gush of water when you turn on the faucet.

TORMAN: It just came out that much.

Mr. BAKER: It came out that much, and, bingo, she was breathing.

TORMAN: So why not CPR?

Mr. SHEBOR: You can blow as much air as you want, but I--I suspected that seeing the amount of vomit in her mouth and her nose, I knew that she had water in her lungs, and CPR don't go through water.

TORMAN: Which is exactly what Dr. Henry Heimlich has been saying lately. The Heimlich maneuver isn't just for choking, it's for drowning, too.

Mr. HENRY HEIMLICH (Heimlich Maneuver): We've proven that the Heimlich maneuver gets water out of the lungs of drowning victims and that's what saves their lives. They--you can't get air into the lungs until you get the water out.

TORMAN: When someone drowns, at first they hold their breath, then the main breathing tube in the throat goes into spasm, closing off the lungs. The lack of oxygen then takes its toll, the person is unconscious and the throat opens up again, often letting water flood into the lungs.

What's the correct way to do the Heimlich maneuver? I can't think of a better source.

Mr. HEIMLICH: Turn around.

TORMAN: OK

Mr. HEIMLICH: You--the--rescuer--puts your arms around the victim. You feel for the bottom of the rib cage 'cause you always want to go below the ribs. You make a fist and put the thumb side of the fist just above the belly button. The nice soft part of the belly. You grasp your fist with your other hand and you press inward and upward with a quick thrust. Now you repeat that until the object comes out or the water starts coming out.

TORMAN: OK.

Mr. HEIMLICH: And if the person is unconscious, it can be done with them lying down. But while Heimlich and others are firm believers in this approach, the American Red Cross doesn't quite agree.

Mr. LARRY NEWELL (American Red Cross): The American Red Cross follows the consensus of medical opinion in this area. And it's believed that there's only a modest amount of water that exists in the lungs. If someone's not breathing, try to breath for them first. If only takes a matter of seconds. If you can't get the air in, then you do the Heimlich maneuver.

Mr. HEIMLICH: The Heimlich maneuver must be done first or you will not save that person's life. Grasp the fist with your other hand and press inward and upward with a quick thrust.

TORMAN: To convince others, Heimlich has made a public service announcement encouraging folks to use the Heimlich maneuver first, an announcement Todd paid attention to.

Mr. SHEBOR: It was a gut instinct, and it was also just like a flashback of seeing Dr. Heimlich behind his desk saying do the Heimlich in a drowning case first.

TORMAN: And it worked.

Mr. SHEBOR: No question it Worked.

TORMAN: Now Heimlich is actually in the process of getting case studies to show where the drownings with or without the Heimlich maneuver and CPR works, and he hopes to make the same kind of convincing argument that led to the choking maneuver being adopted. He's got me convinced.

ZAHN: All right. Dr. Howard Torman. Seventeen minutes before the hour. More to come.