

Heimlich Manoeuvre

JV Pai-Dhungat*, Falguni Parikh**



Stamps issued - "Learn to Manoeuvre" shows Mickey Mouse stopping Donald Duck Choking, Uganda, 1990

Henry Jay Heimlich, an American thoracic surgeon was born in 1920. The number of people choking to death alarmed him and he started to investigate whether pressure applied to the chest was enough to expel the object; he soon realised that it was pressure to the diaphragm, which was really needed. Heimlich suggested the use of a fist-placing the thumb against victim's upper abdomen and grasping it with the other hand from the back, with quick upward thrusts. He published the advantages of this method in an article in *Emergency Medicine*, in June 1974, entitled "Pop goes the Cafe Coronary". Within weeks of publication, Heimlich started receiving reports about how it was saving lives. JAMA said they were so impressed with the techniques that they were naming it the Heimlich manoeuvre.

From 1976-1985, the American Heart Association and Red cross recommended the guidelines for choking rescuers, which was nicknamed "the five and five". It recommended applying five back blows first and if rescue failed, to carry out Heimlich manoeuvre 5 times. In July 1985, back blows were removed from guidelines and only Heimlich manoeuvre was advocated. The 2006 replaced the phrase "Heimlich Manoeuvre" to "abdominal thrusts".

The drowning rescue guidelines warned against the use of Heimlich manoeuvre in drowning, as not only was its efficacy unproven in such cases, but also it was positively dangerous, due to the risk of vomiting and choking.

In 1960s, Heimlich had devised a simple and inexpensive uni-directional valve in Vietnam War that saved the lives of many soldiers shot in the chest, by removing air and blood from the chest. Thus his contributions have saved thousands of lives.

There have been many notable victims of choking. India's soaring legend, the first Chief Air Marshal Subroto Mukerjee, had gone to inaugurate Air India's first service to Tokyo in 1960. He died suddenly, when food morsel choked him to death, in a Tokyo restaurant, while dining with a senior Navy Officer.

Tennessee William, Pulitzer Prize winner for "A Street Car named Desire", choked to death with the cap of an eye drop bottle, while he held it in his mouth and leaned back to place drops in the eye in 1983.

President George Bush received major media coverage, when he survived choking on a pretzel in January 2002.

*Professor of Medicine, T.N. Medical College (Retd.), Hon. Physician, Bhatia Hospital, Mumbai; **Consultant Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Andheri (West), Mumbai