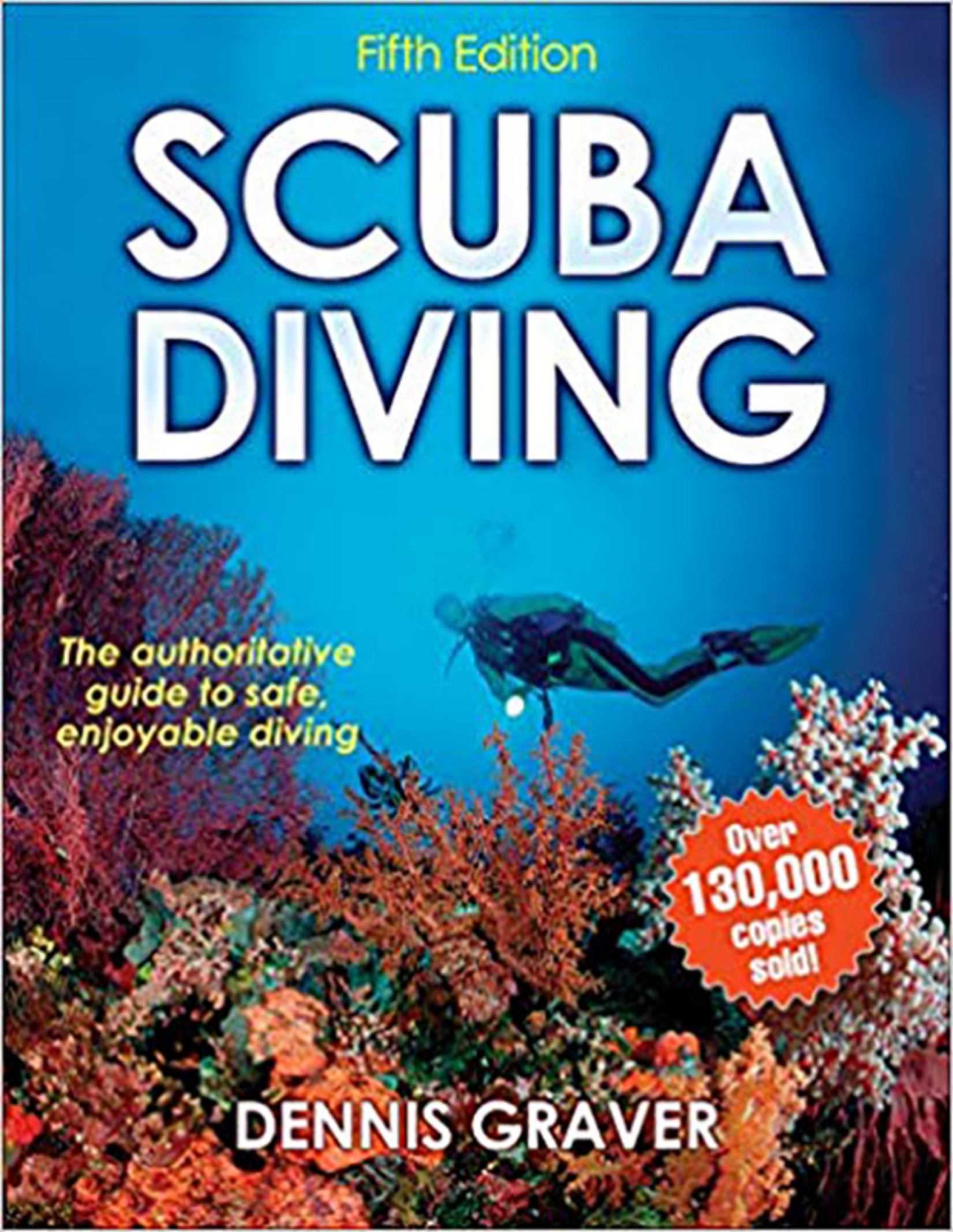
Fifth Edition

SCUBA DIVING



The authoritative guide to safe, enjoyable diving

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DENNIS GRAVER

Scuba Diving

FIFTH EDITION

Dennis K. Graver, EMT, SEI

HUMAN KINETICS

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Graver, Dennis, author.
Title: Scuba diving / Dennis K. Graver, EMT, SEI.
Description: Fifth Edition. | Champaign, IL : Human Kinetics, [2016] |
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016018110 (print) | LCCN 2016031644 (ebook) | ISBN
9781492525769 (print) | ISBN 9781492542032 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Scuba diving.
Classification: LCC GV838.672 .G74 2016 (print) | LCC GV838.672 (ebook) | DDC
797.2/34--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016018110

ISBN: 978-1-4925-2576-9 (print)

The web addresses cited in this text were current as of June 2016, unless otherwise noted.

Acquisitions Editor: Tom Heine; **Developmental Editor:** Anne Hall; **Managing Editor:** Nicole Moore; **Copyeditor:** Jan Feeney; **Permissions Manager:** Martha Gullo; **Senior Graphic Designer:** Nancy Rasmus; **Cover Designer:** Keith Blomberg; **Photograph (cover):** Dirscherl Reinhard/Prisma/age fotostock; **Photographs (interior):** Dennis Graver, unless otherwise noted; **Photo Asset Manager:** Laura Fitch; **Visual Production Assistant:** Joyce Brumfield; **Photo Production Manager:** Jason Allen; **Art Manager:** Kelly Hendren; **Associate Art Manager:** Heidi Richter; **Illustrations:** © Human Kinetics; **Printer:** Walsworth

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Printed in the United States of America 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper in this book is certified under a sustainable forestry program.

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Scuba Diving

FIFTH EDITION

Contents

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Foreword

Recreational scuba diving has progressed from its beginnings in the 1950s. Dennis Graver's fifth edition of *Scuba Diving* is uniquely designed toward a level of education that provides new divers with an exceptional level of knowledge while promoting safety and enjoyment. With our training agencies, Scuba Educators International (the former YMCA scuba program) and PDIC International, our goal is to provide a full education for new divers. This text accomplishes that goal and perhaps can also be used for advanced programs as well.

At a time when instant gratification leads many to seek recreational activities that can be accomplished with little effort in a brief time, scuba takes new divers into an environment that remains challenging. Therefore, the need for a full education has not changed. Perhaps the delivery of information will change in the future; however, the need to understand the complexities of the undersea world will not.

In addition to bringing this fifth edition up to current levels of information, Dennis has provided end-of-chapter questions that result in additional learning. This edition is among the best of texts in the scuba industry for new divers.

Dave Barry wrote, "There is nothing wrong with looking at the surface of the ocean itself, except that when you finally see what goes on underwater, you realize that you've been missing the whole point." I couldn't agree more.

Tom Leaird, CEO
Scuba Educators International
PDIC International

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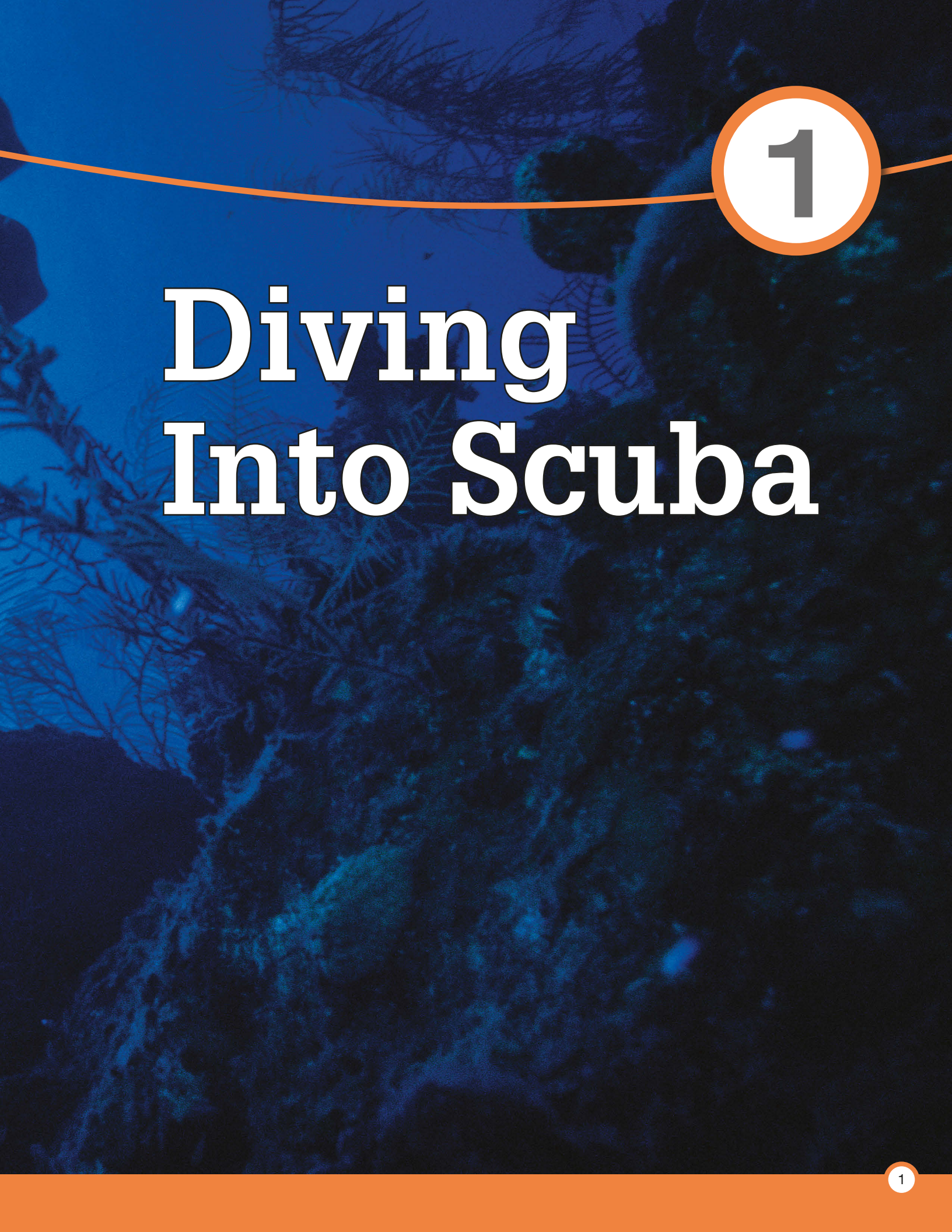
Acknowledgments

My appreciation includes the review of the Application of Knowledge (AOK) questions by Dr. Terry Beattie, former diving medical services officer for the Washington, DC diving unit. His physiology expertise was also helpful.

Wall diving in Haiti



1

Diving Into Scuba

Dive In and Discover

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

- Describe the joys of diving.
- Define the terms *closed circuit*, *open circuit*, *scuba*, *semi-closed circuit*, and *C-card*.
- Explain the training requirements for participation in scuba diving activities.
- List two medical conditions that disqualify an individual from scuba diving.
- Describe three risks associated with scuba diving.
- List several questions to ask when selecting an entry-level scuba diver training course.
- Explain several responsibilities that you assume when you become a certified scuba diver.

The Joys of Diving

As a diver, you are weightless and can move in all directions. Your freedom approaches that of a bird as you move in three dimensions in a fluid environment. Diving weightless in clear water in a forest of underwater plants with sunlight streaming down is only one of many unforgettable experiences awaiting you.

Just as there are mountains, plains, and various environments above water, there are various environments for you to experience underwater. Coral reefs, kelp forests, incredible rock formations, and other natural wonders await divers in various geographical regions. In addition, divers can explore piers, jetties, quarries, mysterious shipwrecks, and other artificial structures. The variety of underwater sights is limitless. There is more to view underwater than anyone could possibly see in an entire lifetime. A range of activities—such as photography, hunting, and collecting—make diving challenging and rewarding. Scuba diving includes an activity to interest everyone.

Divers are friendly and easy to get to know; their camaraderie is well known. Diving is a sharing activity, and there is much to share. If you enjoy traveling, you will probably love diving. Dive travel is the number one business of recreational diving. Reasonably priced dive vacations to exotic islands abound. Most divers plan one or more diving vacations each year.

The sensations of diving are fantastic but are difficult to explain. Words cannot describe the peaceful solitude of inner space. Diving contributes to good health, can help reduce work-related stress, can increase self-esteem, and can make you feel great. You need to experience the emotions and sensations for yourself. You will then begin to know the joys of diving.

A giant grouper

When you descend beneath the surface of the water, you enter an entirely new and beautiful world. You have opportunities to see incredible life-forms that only a few people ever see. Imagine swimming in a giant aquarium, and you'll get a glimpse of what you can expect to experience in the underwater world.

How Diving Evolved

Interest in the underwater world has always existed. Driven by curiosity and the need for food, people have ventured beneath the surface of Earth's seas for thousands of years. Records exist of sponge divers, oyster pearl divers, military divers, and even salvage regulations dating back to 3000 BC. In ancient times, the two methods employed for diving were breath holding and the use of an inverted, air-filled bell (which was large and heavy). John Lethbridge, an Englishman, developed an oak cylinder diving engine in 1715 to pump air into a bell. The hand-operated air compressor, invented in 1770, allowed fresh air to be pumped into a submerged diving bell. In 1772, Sieur Freminet of France invented a helmet-hose system that permitted divers to work without a bell. The greatest early advancement in underwater equipment occurred in 1837, when Augustus Siebe (a German living in England) invented the first closed-dress diving suit, which became known as the hard-hat system. Siebe's system was so effective that it dominated underwater work for 100 years, and it is still in use today.

The origin of recreational diving can be traced to 1825. That year, William H. James, an Englishman, invented the first **open-circuit** self-contained underwater breathing apparatus **(scuba)** system. Although this system was not very practical, it did solve the problems of the air hose tether and the depth restrictions related to oxygen poisoning. Benoit Rouquayrol (a French mining engineer) and Auguste Denayrouze (a French naval officer) invented the aerophore in 1865. Their creation is considered the source of modern scuba equipment.

Later, two Englishmen, Henry Fleuss and Robert Davis, developed a **closed-circuit** oxygen rebreather system in 1878. This system eliminated the air hose that had previously tethered divers and restricted their movement. The system had great military application because bubbles were not exhausted into the water. Oxygen rebreathers were used extensively by Italian and British frogmen during World War II. However, the use of oxygen rebreather systems is limited to a depth of 20 feet (about 7.6 m) because breathing pure oxygen at greater pressures causes convulsions, which can be fatal during submersion.

Yves Le Prieur of France developed a manually controlled open-circuit scuba system in the early 1920's (year disputed); however, modern scuba diving was launched with the development of a "demand" scuba system that was perfected by Frenchmen Emile Gagnan and Jacques Cousteau in 1943. With this system, a diver could demand compressed air from a steel cylinder by simply inhaling from a pressure regulator held in the mouth. Scuba was introduced in the United States in 1950 and has been popular ever since.

The military has continued to improve underwater breathing systems that have found their way into use by recreational divers. The latest scuba systems are **semi-closed-circuit** rebreathers. These systems use sophisticated electronics to control the oxygen mixture that a diver breathes, periodically releasing only a small amount of bubbles. High levels of training, frequent use, and dedicated maintenance are required for the safe use of these expensive rebreathers. Table 1.1 outlines the basic features of each type of breathing system in more detail.

The Diving Community

The recreational diving community consists of equipment manufacturers, diving retailers, diving educators, diver training organizations, dive resorts, diving

Table 1.1 Scuba System Comparisons

Open-circuit scuba	Semi-closed-circuit scuba	Closed-circuit scuba
User inhales compressed air	User inhales oxygen and inert gas	User inhales pure oxygen
Exhaled air exhausted into water	Exhaled gases enter closed system	Exhaled gases enter closed system
Air supply duration varies with depth	Carbon dioxide absorbed within system	Carbon dioxide absorbed within system
Components simple	Oxygen added as needed	Oxygen added as needed
Unit easily maintained	Air supply duration unaffected by depth	Depth limit of 25 feet
Affordable	Components sophisticated and complex	Convulsions and death possible
Basic training required for use	Unit requires high maintenance	Components simple
	Expensive	High maintenance
	Highly technical specialty training required	Not available for recreational use
		A predecessor to semi-closed-circuit scuba

supervisors, dive guides, dive clubs and associations, publishing companies, and certified divers. Commercial, scientific, and professional diving are not considered recreational pursuits; separate communities are involved in these types of diving. This book addresses only recreational skin diving and scuba diving. A scuba diver breathes compressed air underwater, while a skin diver holds his or her breath while submerged.

Few laws pertain to recreational scuba diving. The laws that exist do not govern who may dive. The diving industry is self-regulating. The diving community realizes that it is dangerous when people who have not completed a sanctioned course of instruction attempt scuba diving. Dive businesses require proof of completion of training before they will allow you to have your scuba tanks filled or allow you to participate in diving activities. Many dive operations also require proof of recent experience documented in a diving logbook. If you have not been diving for a year or more, you may be required to complete at least one dive under the supervision of a diving professional. The supervised dive requirement helps increase the safety of divers whose skills may need to be refreshed.

When you complete your training requirements as a scuba diver, you receive a certification card called a **C-card**. Most C-cards do not require renewal, but the recreational diving community universally recommends the completion of refresher training after periods of inactivity in excess of six months.

Certified divers may dive without supervision or may employ the services of a diving guide. Just because a divemaster or diving supervisor is aboard a dive boat, you should not assume that this person is a guide who will dive with you. Guide services are not necessarily included with diving trips. If you want a guide to lead you about underwater and show you the sights, you should arrange for guide services in advance.

You will learn more about the community as your diving experience increases. Many opportunities for adventure and enjoyment can be found within this community. Get actively involved in the community when you complete your training and officially qualify as a scuba diver.

Diver Training

A national diver training organization must sanction your training. The training organization establishes standards of training that you must meet before the organization will issue a certification card. The Appendix A includes a list of national diver training organizations. Your instructor should have credentials that identify her as a qualified instructor. The instructor's membership in the training organization must be current in order for the person to be qualified to teach and certify divers. Be sure to confirm your instructor's qualifications.

An entry-level training course usually consists of a series of academic sessions, pool or confined-water (pool-like conditions in open water) sessions, and open-water training (in actual diving locations). You will learn theory in the classroom, learn skills in controlled conditions, and then apply your skills in an actual diving environment. This logical progression is common for all approved diver training courses.

The minimum requirements for your training are as follows: You should have four or more academic sessions, four or more pool sessions, and at least four scuba dives in open water. A skin dive in open water may also be part of your training.

Your initial training should involve a total of 30 to 40 hours of instruction. The instruction should occur over a period of several weeks instead of a few days. The time between class sessions allows you to reflect on your training and helps you absorb and retain the knowledge and skills better than a concentrated training schedule would.

Proficiency Testing

After you have learned and practiced the skills of skin and scuba diving, you must demonstrate your competence at a level established by the agency sponsoring your training. Proficiency testing may include diving exercises that are challenging and fun. Examples include mask recovery and clearing for skin diving, simulated boat exit for scuba diving, alternate air source breathing, buddy breathing, equipment handling, and a sequence of surface entry and equipment donning known as a bailout.

Diving Prerequisites

Scuba diving can be undertaken by anyone over 12 years of age who is in normal health and has a reasonable degree of physical fitness. People younger than this should not participate in scuba diving (even when supervised by adults) because they do not have the mental and emotional maturity to deal with the problems that might arise. Skin diving is a good activity for youngsters if they are well supervised.

For scuba diving, you need to have swimming ability, but you do not need to be a competitive swimmer. At the beginning of your training, you should be able to swim 200 yards (183 m) nonstop at the surface using any combination

of strokes. There is no time requirement for the swim. Being comfortable in the water is more important than being able to swim fast. You also need to be able to swim 25 feet (7.6 m) underwater with no push-off. By the end of the course, you should be able to swim 300 yards (274 m) nonstop at the surface using any combination of strokes; you should also be able to swim 50 feet (15.2 m) underwater with no push-off. The goal is to increase your aquatic proficiency during the course.

Good health means your heart, lungs, and circulation are functional and that you do not have any serious diseases. Any medical conditions—even if controllable under normal conditions—that might incapacitate you in the water could cause you to drown while scuba diving. Some individuals with asthma or diabetes may be able to dive if they have obtained special medical approval. People with physical disabilities may also dive if they have medical approval from a physician. The air spaces in your body—sinuses, ears, and lungs—must be normal because changes in pressure affect them. Other medical conditions, such as seizure disorders, absolutely preclude a person's involvement in diving; a seizure while diving can be fatal. Women who are pregnant should not scuba dive. Increased pressure can adversely affect an unborn child. Pregnant women may choose to participate in snorkeling as an alternative to scuba diving. Many women ask whether they may dive during menstruation. Menstruation does not preclude a woman from diving if her health permits participation in other sports during that time.

You need to be emotionally fit as well as physically fit for diving. If you are terrified of water or of feeling confined, diving is probably an activity you should avoid. Normal concerns are to be expected, but stark terror is unacceptable.

You should have a physical examination before you begin your training, especially if it has been more than a year since your last exam. Ask your instructor to recommend a diving physician. Physicians who do not understand the physiology of scuba diving sometimes inappropriately grant approval to people who have medical conditions that place them at great risk in and under the water. Your instructor can likely recommend a physician who understands medical issues related to scuba.

Diving Risks

All activities present some risk. There is risk involved in walking across the street or driving a car. To avoid injury while participating in an activity, people take precautions for their safety. Precautions must be taken for scuba diving just as for any other pursuit. The level of risk in diving is similar to that of flying in an

SCUBA WISE

I nearly drowned when I was 4 years old, and I became terrified of water. When I was 8, I spent a summer with my uncle in Ohio. He would take me to Lake Erie and give me pennies if I would wade into water deep enough to cover my navel. I learned to swim as a Boy Scout at age 11. Although I completed a lifesaving class at age 16, I was still apprehensive about water. When I learned skin and scuba diving and discovered that I could actually relax in water, the water became my ally. For the first time in my life, I enjoyed water and was able to rid myself of my childhood fears. Just because someone feels anxiety about water does not mean that the person can't enjoy scuba diving. If you can swim 200 yards, you can learn to dive and to love being in and under the water.

airplane. Both are low-risk activities when done with well-maintained equipment according to established rules and in good environmental conditions. Unfortunately, both activities are unforgiving if you ignore the rules and recommendations designed to minimize the risks.

The following information (and the information throughout this book) will make you aware of injuries that scuba divers can incur. This information alerts you to potential hazards and, more important, helps you learn to avoid injury. If you do what you are taught to do as a diver, your risk will be minimal, and all of your diving experiences will likely be pleasant ones.

Pressure changes with depth. Changes in pressure can severely injure bodily air spaces if you are not in good health or if you fail to equalize the pressure in the bodily air spaces with the surrounding pressure. You will learn equalizing techniques as part of your training. Gases are normally dissolved in the fluids and tissues of your body. Increased pressure increases the amount of gas dissolved in your body. If you ascend too rapidly from a dive, the gases in your system can form bubbles and produce a serious illness known as **decompression illness**. By regulating your depth, the duration of your dive, and your rate of ascent, you can avoid decompression illness. Failure to heed depth and time schedules and ascent rates can result in serious, permanent injuries.

Diving can be strenuous at times. You need sufficient physical fitness and stamina to handle long swims, currents, and other situations that may arise. If you become winded from climbing a flight of stairs, you may need to improve your level of fitness before learning to scuba dive. Exhaustion in and under the water is hazardous. A good exercise to improve fitness for diving is swimming with fins while breathing through a snorkel.

Diving takes place in water, an alien environment. You use life-support equipment to dive, but you cannot depend entirely on the equipment for your well-being. Aquatic skills are essential in and around water. People with very weak aquatic ability can drown when minor equipment problems occur—problems that could be handled easily by a person with good water skills. To be a scuba diver, you must be comfortable in the water.

You should not be overly concerned with the potential risks of diving because the possible

Red Sea coral cave

injuries are preventable. Learning how to dive as safely as possible is the purpose of your training. You will learn to minimize the risk of injury and maximize your enjoyment of the underwater world.

Selecting a Dive Course

There are many diver training organizations and thousands of professional diving educators. Your phone book might list diving businesses that offer sanctioned courses. Many universities, community colleges, and recreational departments also offer scuba courses. (See Appendix A for a list of diver training organizations.) Ask about the qualifications, experience, and reputation of several diving instructors in your area to select the course that can provide you with the best possible training. Here are some questions you should ask:

- Is this training sanctioned by a diver training agency?
- How long has the instructor been teaching scuba diving?
- Which levels of training is the instructor qualified to teach?
- May I speak with the graduates of a recent class?
- Why is this course better than others in the area?
- Are assisting and rescue techniques taught in the course?
- How many instructor-supervised open-water dives are included?

The tuition for diving instruction is usually between $200 and $300. The lowest-priced course may not necessarily be a bargain. Find out what is included with the course fee and, more important, what the total cost will be for you to become certified as a scuba diver. You do not have to purchase all the equipment needed to scuba dive, but you need to have a mask, snorkel, fins, and usually boots and gloves for your training (see figure 1.1). Use of the additional required equipment is typically part of the course tuition.

You should find out whether the price of the course includes the costs of educational materials and certification. There may be additional costs for travel, lodging, parking, boat fees, and equipment rental for open-water training. Determine the complete cost before enrolling in a course.

When you have selected the best program for you and have enrolled in a course, you should receive a reading assignment for your first session. If you are not given an assignment, speak with the instructor; your learning will be enhanced if you read in advance about the topics to be presented in class. Good diving instructors provide a handout with reading assignments.

Figure 1.1 Required scuba diving training equipment.

Diving Responsibilities

When you qualify as a scuba diver, you assume many responsibilities. You are responsible for your safety, for the safety of those you dive with, for the image of scuba divers, and for the preservation of the diving environment. The diving community encourages divers to accept responsibility for their actions. To be part of the diving community, you need to be a responsible diver. Learn what you should do, then do what you learn.

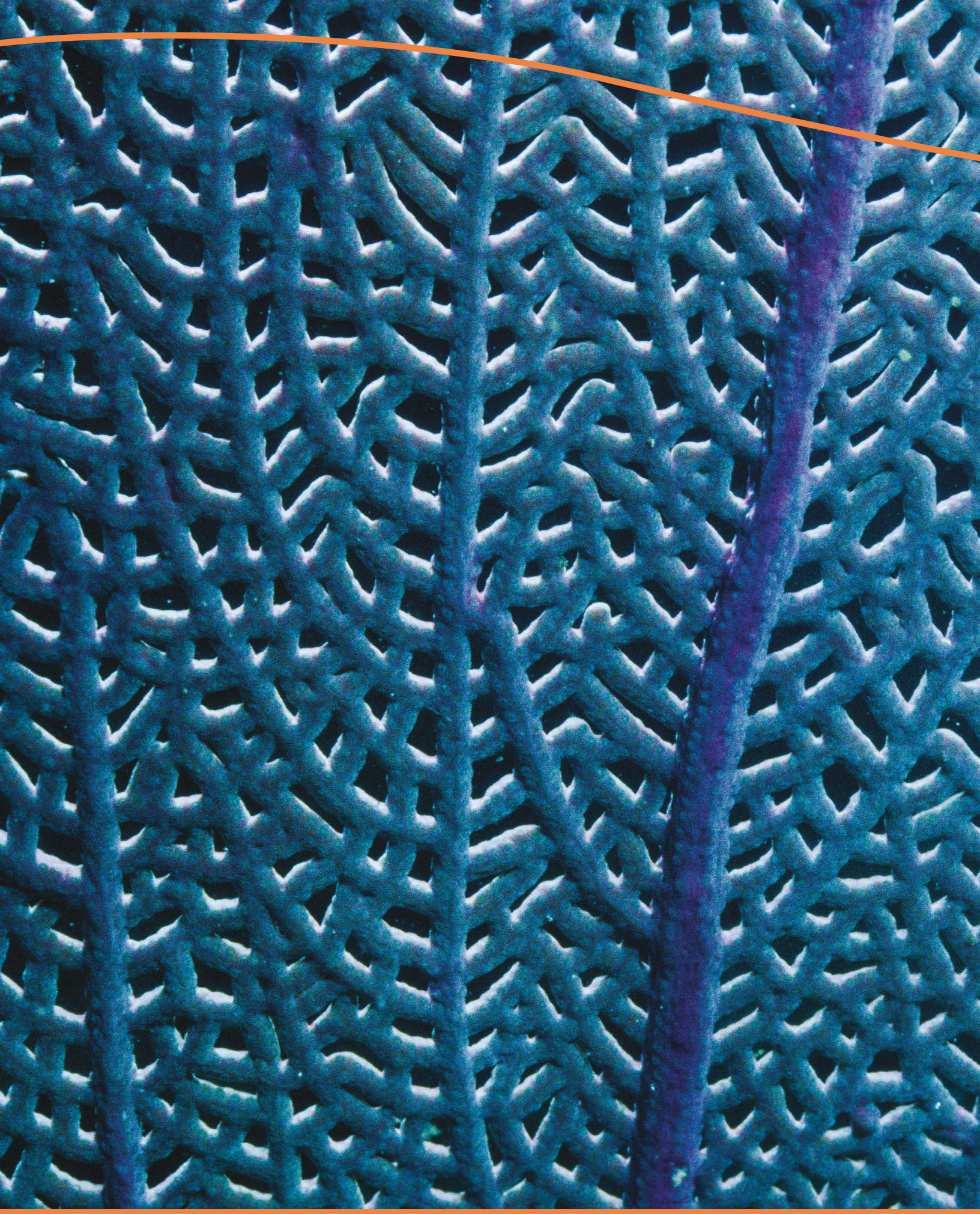
Summary

Diving can be a source of great joy. Many exciting experiences await the trained diver. You need dive credentials to participate in diving activities. You must complete diver training to obtain your C-card and logbook. But diving is not for everyone. You must have normal health, good swimming skills, and reasonable physical fitness. Diving poses risks that a well-trained, wise, and fit diver can minimize. Compare training programs and choose the best education, which may not be the quickest or the least expensive. Remember that you accept a great deal of responsibility when you become a diver. Do not assume that you can transfer the responsibility for a dive accident to someone else. Ultimately, you control your actions underwater. Become a competent, self-reliant diver who adheres to recommended safety practices, and you will discover the joy of diving.

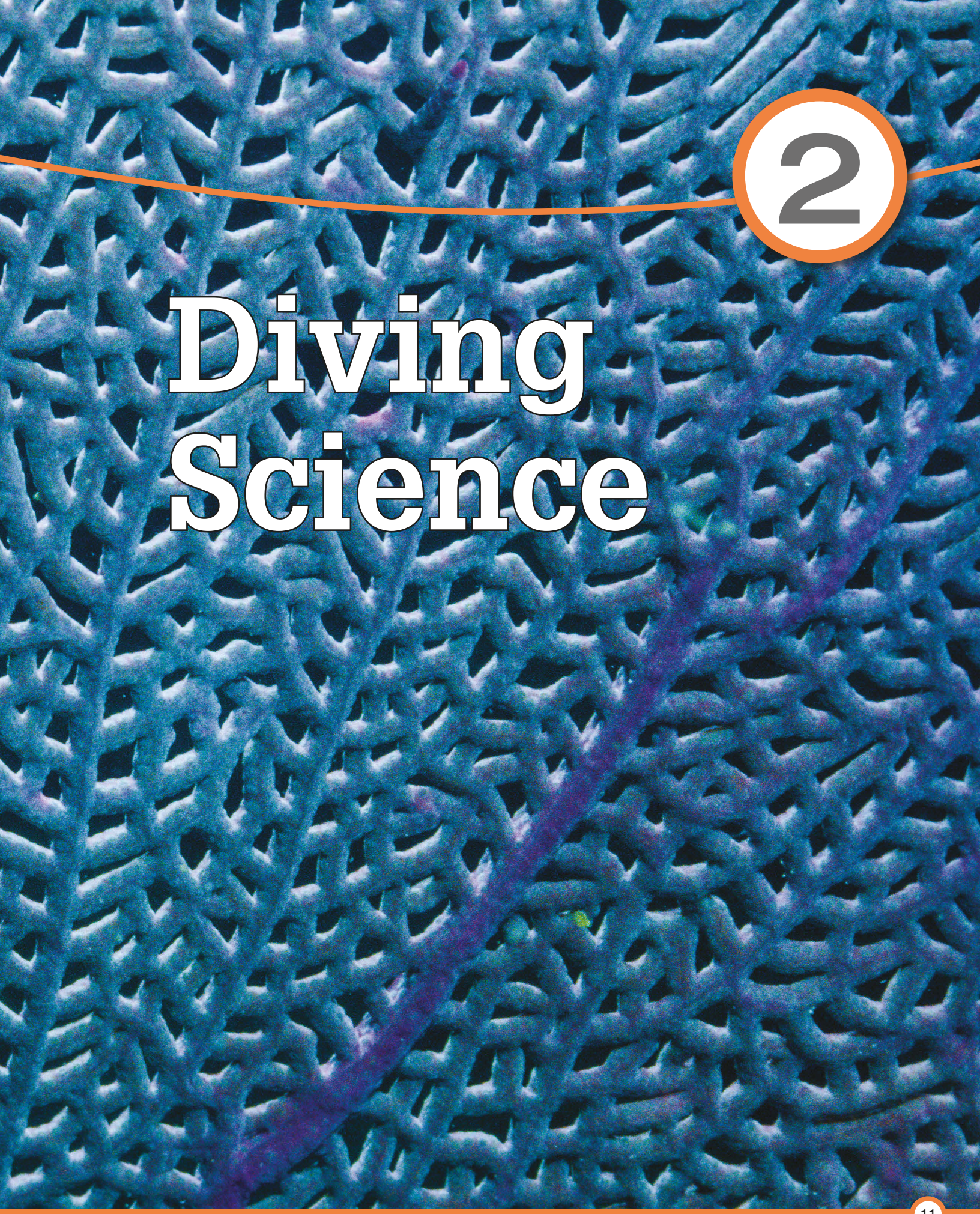
Application-of-Knowledge (AOK) Questions

The following questions will enhance your understanding of what you have learned in this and every chapter. Take time to consider each question before you look at the answer, which is at the back of the book in Appendix B. When you apply the basic knowledge you have learned and correctly respond to the following questions, you demonstrate understanding, which is a higher level of learning than mere knowledge. Do not be concerned if you do not have a correct response. Your analysis of the question and the revelation of the answer will increase your understanding.

1. What is your primary reason for learning to scuba dive? What do you think you will do while scuba diving after completion of your initial training?
2. Why do beginning recreational divers use open-circuit breathing systems instead of closed-circuit systems?
3. Why should you document your dives in a logbook?
4. What are the advantages of completing a 40-hour scuba diving course rather than a course that is much shorter in duration?
5. Why is a medical examination recommended for those who want to learn scuba diving? What type of doctor is the best choice for a scuba diving medical exam?
6. List three actions you can take to minimize your risk of injury when scuba diving.
7. What are some of the factors that you should consider when selecting a scuba diving course?
8. List three actions you can take to demonstrate that you are a responsible diver.



A sea fan



2

Diving Science

Dive In and Discover

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

- List three body air spaces of concern to divers.
- Describe the process of hearing in air.
- Describe the cardiorespiratory process.
- Explain the effect of carbon dioxide on breathing.
- Define the terms *eardrum*, *middle ear*, *eustachian tube*, *nitrogen narcosis*, *hyperventilation*, *hypoventilation*, *density*, *buoyancy*, *pressure*, *gauge pressure*, *absolute pressure*, *Boyle's law*, *Gay-Lussac's law*, *Dalton's law*, *squeeze*, *reverse block*, *ingassing*, *outgassing*, and *partial pressure*.
- Explain the principle of buoyancy and the key to controlling buoyancy.
- Explain the effects of pressure and temperature on a volume of air in a flexible container.
- Explain why it is important to vent your lungs when you ascend in water.
- Convert any temperature to absolute temperature.
- Explain the process of ingassing and outgassing.
- State the two primary factors that affect the air consumption of a scuba diver.
- List four methods of heat loss.
- Describe three potential problems for scuba divers that may be caused by humidity.
- Describe the effects of water on vision and hearing.

Anatomy for the Diver

Inside your body are air-filled spaces that are affected by changes in pressure. The three body air spaces of primary concern to you as a diver are the lungs, the ears, and the sinuses. Understanding the structure and function of your throat will also help you as a diver. Figure 2.1 illustrates the structure and functions of the sinuses, throat, and lungs.

Sinuses

The sinuses warm and humidify inspired air. They secrete mucus to help protect the body by trapping airborne germs. The small airways that connect the sinuses to the nasal passages are normally open. Congested sinuses pose problems for divers. In the next chapter, you will learn more about sinus problems and how to prevent them.

Throat

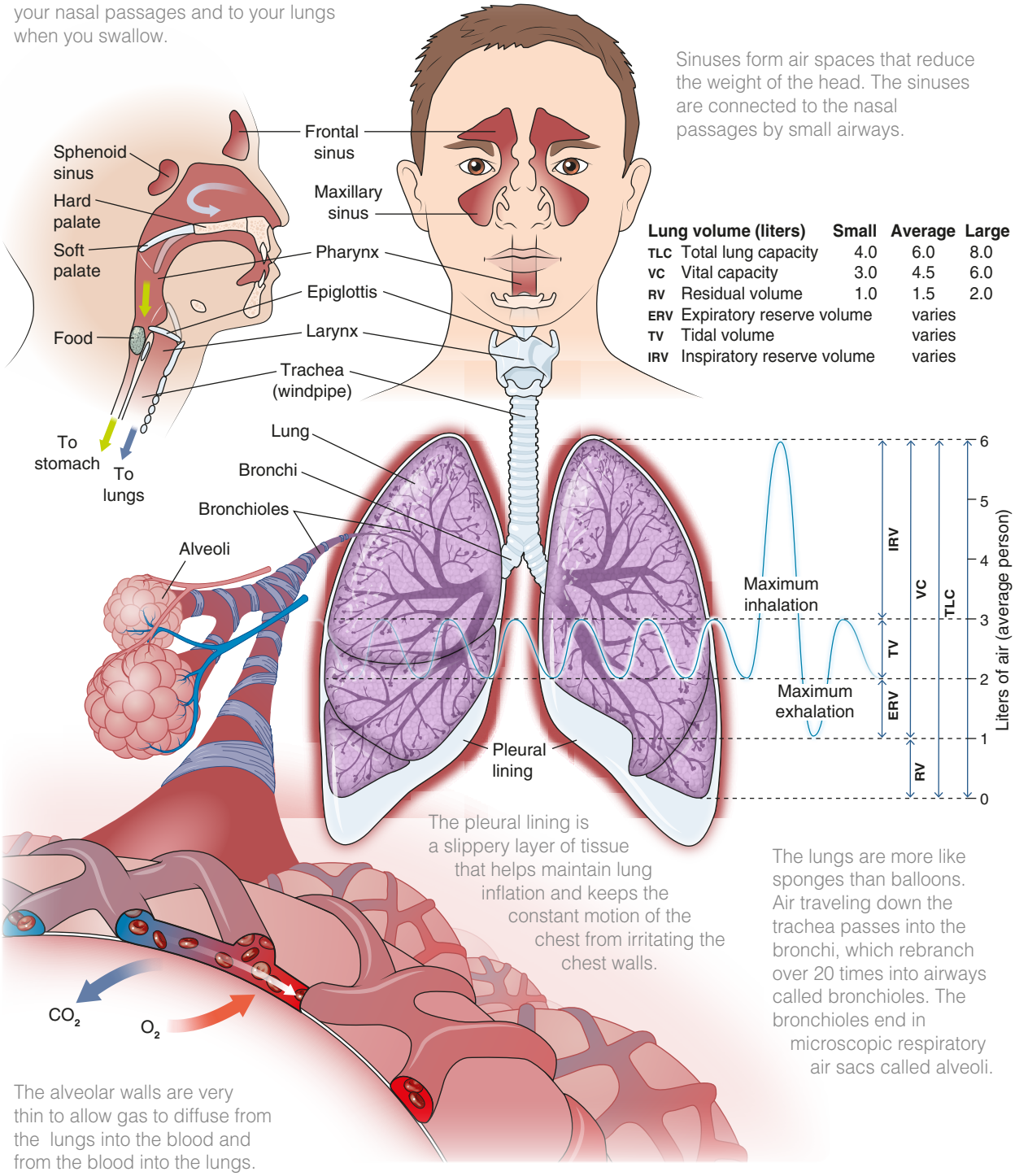
In addition to being the organ of voice, the throat and larynx help prevent foreign matter from entering the lungs. If something foreign, such as food or water, comes into contact with the larynx, a reflex action causes a spasm of the larynx. Coughing expels the foreign substance. You have experienced this sensation when something has "gone down the wrong pipe." Review the throat section of figure 2.1. During your scuba diving training, you will learn how to keep water out of your larynx to avoid coughing and choking in and under the water.

Lungs

Healthy lungs are essential for scuba diving. The lungs are large organs that contain millions of microscopic air sacs. Your lungs have a maximum capacity and a minimum capacity. When you exhale completely, your lungs are not empty. They contain about 2 pints (1L) of air. The air remaining in your lungs after you have exhaled completely is your residual volume. The amount of air you move in and out of your lungs is your tidal volume. When you are at rest, your tidal volume is small. When you exert yourself, your tidal volume increases until you reach both your maximum lung volume and your residual volume with each breath. Your vital capacity is the difference between the volume of air for a maximum inhalation and the volume of air for a maximum exhalation—typically about 6 to 8 pints (2.8 to 3.8L). In the next chapter, you will learn several reasons why your lungs are the most critical air spaces when diving.

The epiglottis and the soft palate in the back of your pharynx seal the airways to your nasal passages and to your lungs when you swallow.

Sinuses form air spaces that reduce the weight of the head. The sinuses are connected to the nasal passages by small airways.



Lung volume (liters)		Small	Average	Large
TLC	Total lung capacity	4.0	6.0	8.0
VC	Vital capacity	3.0	4.5	6.0
RV	Residual volume	1.0	1.5	2.0
ERV	Expiratory reserve volume		varies	
TV	Tidal volume		varies	
IRV	Inspiratory reserve volume		varies	

The pleural lining is a slippery layer of tissue that helps maintain lung inflation and keeps the constant motion of the chest from irritating the chest walls.

The lungs are more like sponges than balloons. Air traveling down the trachea passes into the bronchi, which rebranch over 20 times into airways called bronchioles. The bronchioles end in microscopic respiratory air sacs called alveoli.

The alveolar walls are very thin to allow gas to diffuse from the lungs into the blood and from the blood into the lungs.

Figure 2.1 Functions of the sinuses, throat, and lungs.

Colorful fish in a Florida coral cave

Your body is a marvelous machine. It performs many complex functions automatically. Your body is well adapted to an air environment, but it can also adjust in many ways to the aquatic environment. In this chapter, you will become familiar with some of the structures and functions of your body that are important for scuba diving. You will learn the differences between the air and water environments and how changes in pressure affect your body. As a diver, you face many challenges in the underwater environment, but these challenges can be managed.

Ears

Behind your **eardrum** is an air space called the **middle ear**, which is illustrated in figure 2.2. The pressure in the middle ear must equal the pressure in the outer ear; otherwise, the eardrum cannot move freely. The next chapter explains how to keep pressure inside your ears equal to external pressure. Your **eustachian tube** allows the equalization of pressure in the middle ear. The liquid-filled cochlea contains hairlike projections called cilia, which convert mechanical movement to electrical signals for the brain. The movement of the oval window by the tiny bones of the middle ear causes the liquid and the cilia in the cochlea to move back and forth. The oval window movement could not take place without a second window in the hearing organ—the round window. When the oval window moves inward, the round window moves outward, and vice versa.

If the motion sensed by your semicircular canals and the visual cues received by your eyes are not in harmony, motion sickness can result. Sudden changes in temperature or pressure in the middle ear can affect your semicircular canals

Abbreviations

✓	**ATA**	atmospheres absolute	✓ **FSW**	feet of seawater
✓	**atm**	atmospheres	✓ **ft**	feet
✓	**CO**	carbon monoxide	✓ **m**	meters
✓	**CO_2**	carbon dioxide	✓ **O_2**	oxygen
✓	**°C**	degrees Celsius	✓ **psia**	pounds per square inch absolute
✓	**°F**	degrees Fahrenheit	✓ **psig**	pounds per square inch gauge
✓	**FFW**	feet of freshwater		

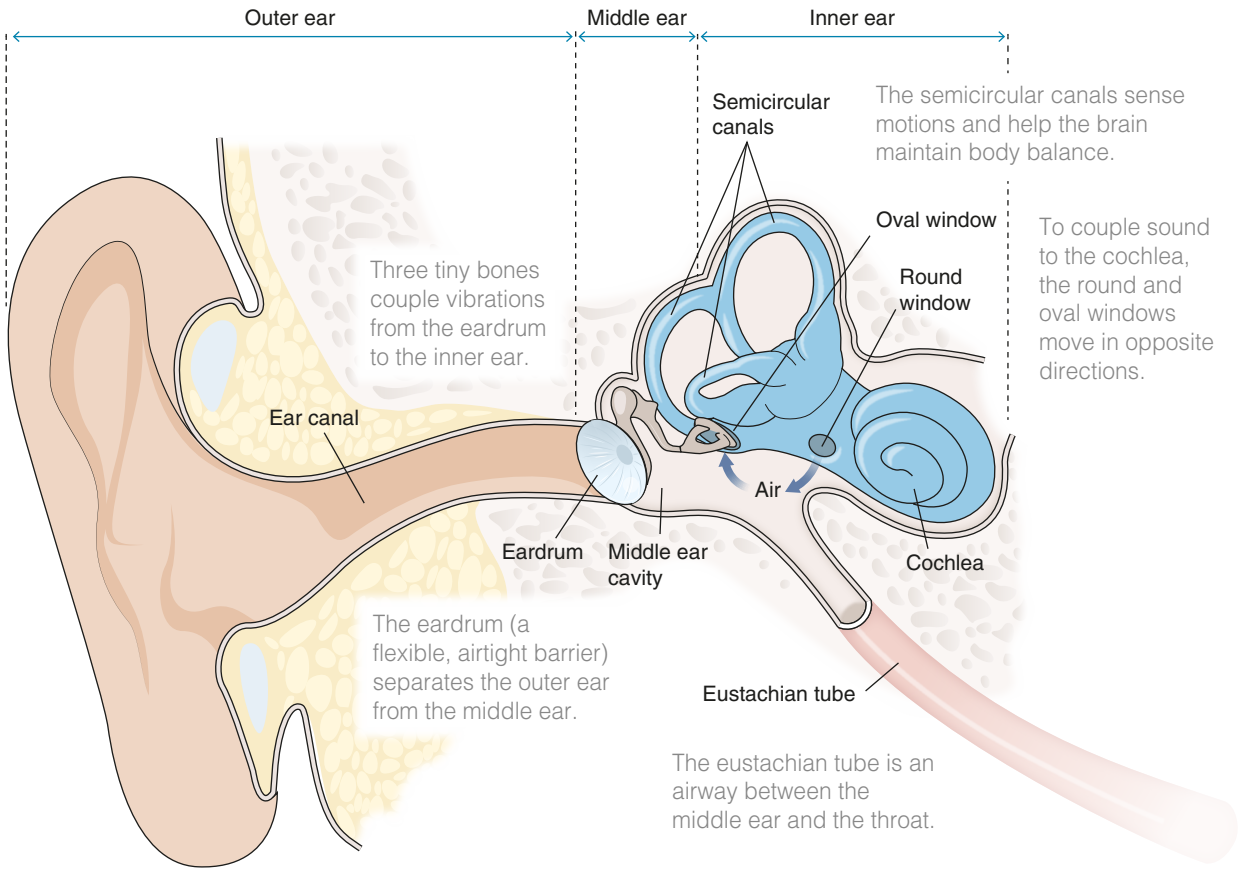


Figure 2.2 Process of hearing in air.

and cause temporary disorientation. (The next chapter presents potential ear problems for divers, how to avoid them, and how to handle them if they happen.)

Teeth

You may be surprised to learn that there are dental concerns for divers. Pressure can affect air pockets in improperly filled teeth and can cause tooth pain. If a tooth hurts only under pressure or only after a dive, see your dentist and tell him what you suspect. The roots of some upper molars extend into the sinus cavities. You should postpone diving for several weeks after you have had a tooth extracted.

Your mouth and jaws are designed for an even bite. If you bite hard on a mouthpiece with only your front teeth for prolonged periods, your jaws will become sore. Special mouthpieces designed for a proper bite can help reduce the problem. You should not have to bite hard on a mouthpiece to hold it in place. If you find biting necessary, get lighter equipment. Prolonged, improper biting that irritates your jaws can lead to serious inflammation of your jaws and ears.

Respiration and Circulation

One of the fascinating processes within the human body is your ability to breathe in air and circulate oxygen to the tissues with no conscious effort. As your level

of exertion increases, your heart and lungs automatically adjust to meet the increased demands for oxygen and nourishment. An understanding of the gases involved in respiration and the basics of respiration and circulation can help you understand the effects and the demands of diving on your lungs and heart.

Gases We Breathe

Several gases affect recreational divers. You need to know about their effects on your body. About 80 percent of air is nitrogen (N^2). At sea-level pressures, nitrogen has no effect on your body. At a depth of about 100 feet (30 m), the increased pressure of the gas has a detrimental effect, which is called **nitrogen narcosis**. Excessive nitrogen in your body at the end of a dive can produce a serious illness known as decompression sickness. You will learn more about nitrogen narcosis and decompression sickness in the next chapter.

Oxygen (O_2) is the gas that supports human life. Any other gas mixed with oxygen serves only as a vehicle for oxygen to be inspired. Approximately 21 percent of air is oxygen (see figure 2.3). You need to breathe at least 10 percent oxygen to remain conscious. However, oxygen breathed under high pressure is poisonous and causes convulsions because oxygen at increased pressure affects your nervous system. You usually have compressed air—not pure oxygen—in your scuba tanks. A specialty form of diving uses a nitrogen and oxygen mixture with a higher percentage of oxygen than is found in air. The mixture, which reduces the effects of nitrogen at depth, is called **nitrox**. The use of special mixed gases, including nitrox, requires special training, equipment, and procedures.

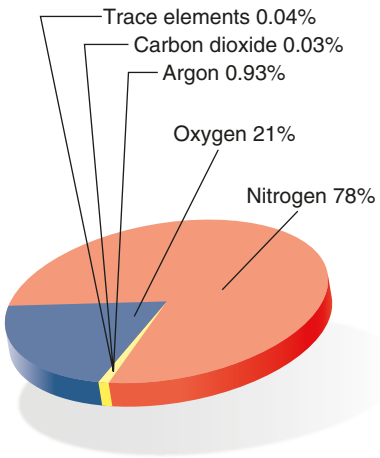


Figure 2.3 Composition of air.

As your tissues use oxygen, they produce carbon dioxide (CO_2). Carbon dioxide is the primary stimulus for respiration. The greater the level of carbon dioxide in your body, the greater your urge to breathe will become. If the level of carbon dioxide in your body becomes too great, unconsciousness will result.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas produced by the incomplete combustion of gas or oil. The exhaust from an internal combustion engine contains carbon monoxide. An oil-lubricated air compressor that overheats can produce carbon monoxide. Even a minute amount of carbon monoxide in your scuba tank can poison you and lead to unconsciousness or death. Air filling stations must take care to avoid contamination of air with carbon monoxide.

Breathing and Circulation Mechanics

When you need to breathe, sensors at the base of your brain send a signal that stimulates your diaphragm to contract and your chest to expand. This draws air into your lungs in the same way that an old-fashioned bellows draws in air when you expand it. Your diaphragm contracts and increases the volume of the chest cavity, while the muscles of your chest expand your chest cavity to inspire air. Figure 2.4 illustrates how the heart, lungs, and circulatory system work in the process of respiration.

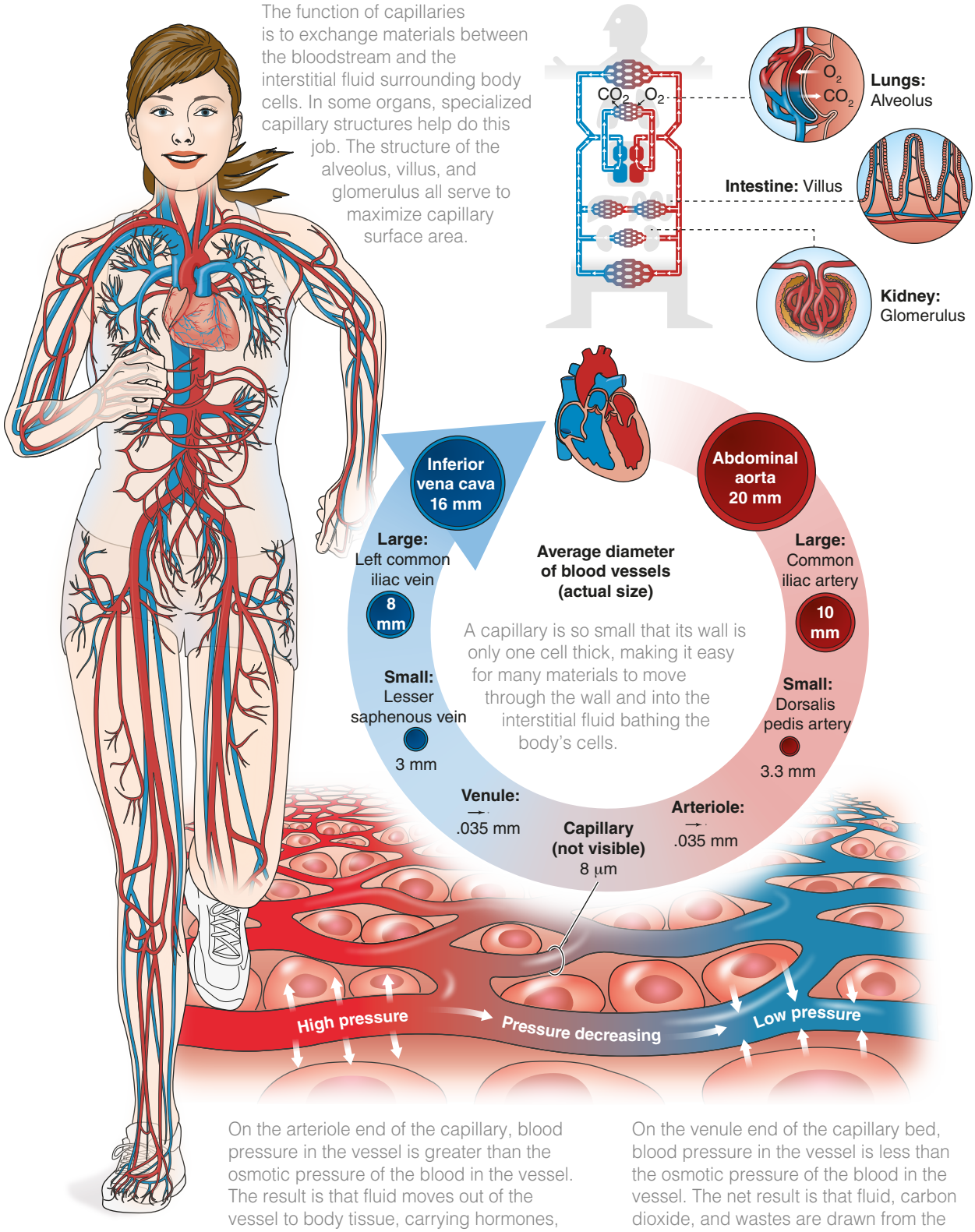


Figure 2.4 The cardiorespiratory system.

Blood consists of plasma (which is a colorless liquid) and a variety of cells. Hemoglobin, a blood component, is the primary oxygen-carrying mechanism in the blood. Approximately 45 percent of the blood is hemoglobin. Hemoglobin releases oxygen when it reaches tissues that need oxygen.

When the tissues use oxygen, they produce carbon dioxide. The carbon dioxide diffuses into the venous system and into the lungs in exchange for oxygen. This completes a circulatory cycle, which takes about 30 seconds.

Carotid sinuses on each side of the neck sense blood pressure within the circulatory system. Excessive pressure on the carotid sinuses during exercise causes the heart to slow when it should be working hard to meet the oxygen demands of the body. Decreased output from the heart can lead to insufficient oxygen for the brain, which can cause unconsciousness. A blackout caused by pressure on the carotid sinuses (see figure 2.5) is a carotid sinus reflex. Therefore, beware of diving equipment that is tight around your neck.

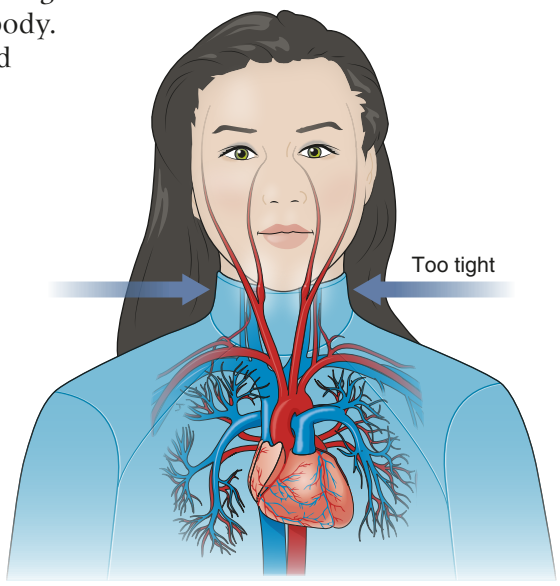


Figure 2.5 Excessive pressure on the carotid sinuses can lead to unconsciousness.

Exhalation is usually a passive process. To exhale carbon-dioxide-laden air from the lungs, the diaphragm relaxes, and the elasticity of the chest cavity forces air from the lungs. You ventilate your lungs approximately 12 to 20 times per minute when at rest. Respiration functions automatically. The key to respiration is the level of carbon dioxide in your circulatory system. When the carbon dioxide in your body reaches a certain level, your brain stimulates respiration. When you voluntarily hold your breath, the buildup of carbon dioxide within your body urges you to breathe. Many people believe that the amount of oxygen in the body controls respiration, but it is primarily the level of carbon dioxide that regulates breathing.

Hyperventilation is rapid, deep breathing in excess of the body's needs. Limited hyperventilation—three or four breaths—enhances breath holding (see figure 2.6*a*). But if you hold your breath after excessive hyperventilation, you may lose consciousness without warning before being stimulated to breathe (see figure 2.6*b*). A breath-holding diver who loses consciousness from lack of oxygen usually blacks out near the surface during ascent. The sudden loss of consciousness near the surface is called **shallow-water blackout**. Loss of consciousness while in the water can cause drowning. You should avoid excessive hyperventilation.

If you breathe rapidly and shallowly, carbon dioxide continues to build in your system, but you do not expel it from your lungs. Inadequate breathing is **hypoventilation**. Shallow breathing is dangerous, especially when you exert yourself, because you can lose consciousness from lack of oxygen. You need to breathe sufficiently to exchange the air in your lungs.

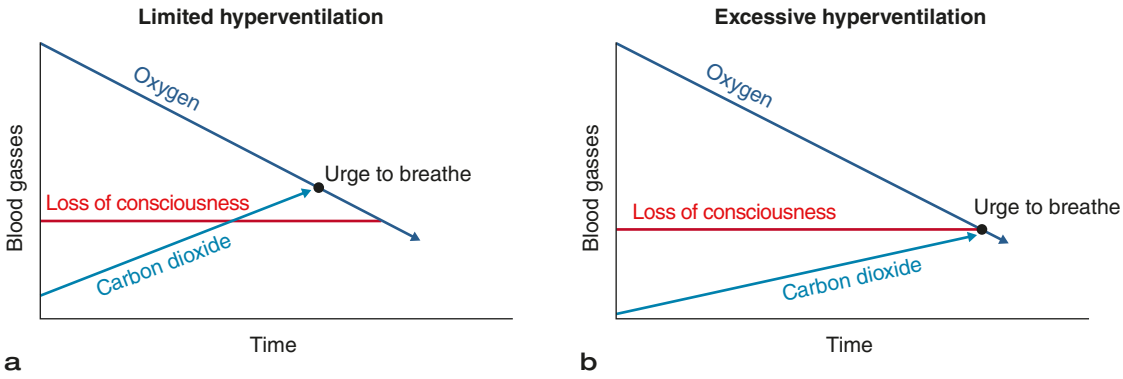


Figure 2.6 Charts showing (*a*) limited hyperventilation and (*b*) excessive hyperventilation.

Contrasts in Air and Water Environments

We live immersed in air, which is a fluid. Air has weight and takes up space. We don't pay much attention to our immersion in air because we are adapted to this environment. We have lived in it all of our lives, and we cannot see the air. The weight of the atmosphere does affect us, however.

Air weighs about 0.08 pound per cubic foot (1.28 mg per cubic cm) at sea level. As altitude increases, air becomes thinner, so its weight per volume is less in the mountains than it is at the seashore (see figure 2.7). The change in the

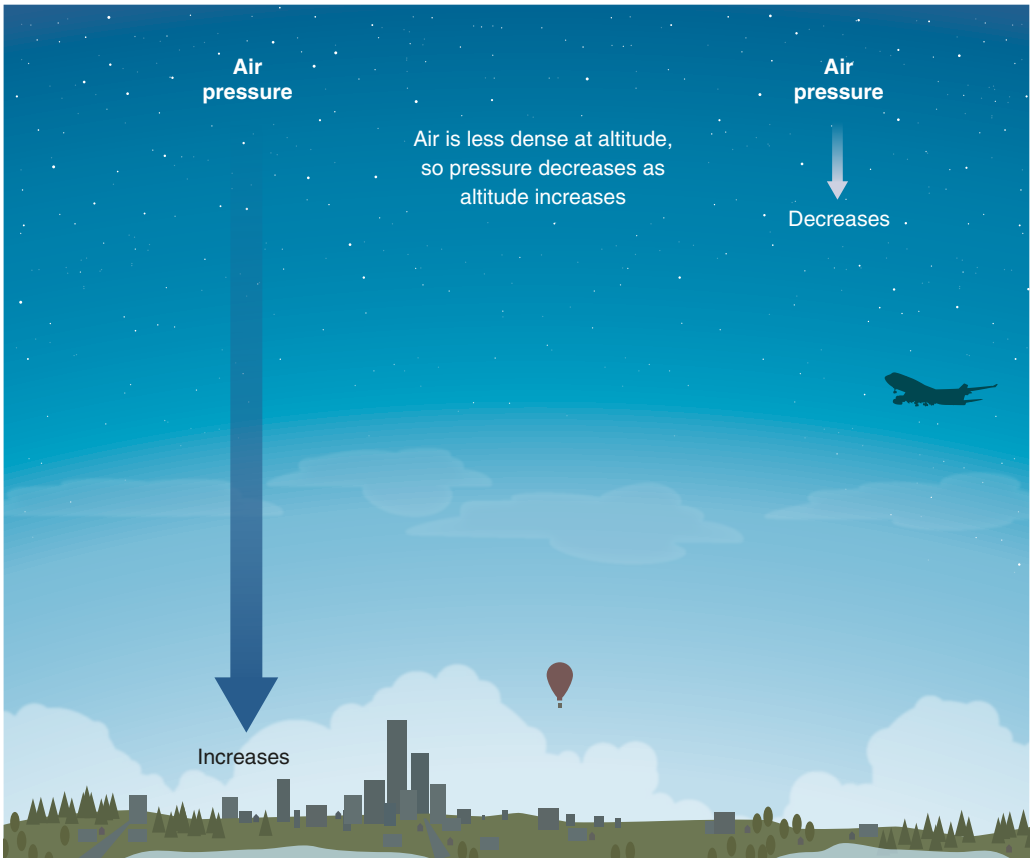


Figure 2.7 Air density and pressure are affected by altitude.