

Guide to camping first aid

Camping in the Country side and getting away from it all can provide a wonderful break, however it can bring us into contact with hazards and creepy crawlies not often faced in city living. Being miles from anywhere takes on quite a different meaning when faced with an emergency! So when you're camping or Country side walking, far from medical help, being up-to-date with first aid techniques and having a well-stocked first aid kit can be vital.

Common injuries, bites, stings and their treatment

The first steps

What should I do?

It is essential that you try to remain calm and think your actions through. This gives everyone, including the patient, confidence in helping to reduce panic.

1. check for breathing
2. try to stop any bleeding
3. minimise pain, where possible
4. reassure the patient

How do I know what is wrong?

Before starting treatment it is worthwhile to take a little time to make a diagnosis, giving everyone confidence that the situation is being handled efficiently and effectively.

- what are the symptoms?
- what do they tell you about the patient's condition?
- what is the most appropriate action?
- if medical assistance is required, get a bystander to call if possible.

Once assessed, and with the help of a well-stocked first aid kit, you'll be able to treat the injury until medical assistance is available.

Dehydration

What causes it?

Dehydration happens when body fluid loss, through perspiration, is greater than fluid intake. It's generally due to lengthy exposure to heat and/or humidity. Prolonged

dehydration can lead to shock and even death.

What are the symptoms?

- pale, cool clammy skin
- rapid breathing
- thirst
- profuse and prolonged sweating
- loss of skin elasticity
- sunken eyes in children

How is it treated?

- ensure complete rest, in shade
- remove any unnecessary clothing
- drink cool water

Heat Exhaustion

What causes it?

Heat exhaustion occurs after prolonged physical exertion in hot and/or humid weather.

What are the symptoms?

- pale, cool clammy skin
- rapid breathing
- profuse and prolonged sweating
- thirst, nausea and/or vomiting
- constant headache
- exhaustion and lethargy

How is it treated?

- ensure complete rest, in shade
- remove any unnecessary clothing
- sponge person with water
- give cool water when nausea has passed

Heat Stroke

What is it?

Heat stroke is when the body's temperature regulation centre in the brain ceases to

function causing the body's temperature to continually rise. Eventually brain damage and even death can result.

What are the symptoms?

- flushed, hot, dry skin
- cessation of sweating
- rapid, weakening pulse
- irrational or aggressive behaviour
- staggering, unable to walk normally
- headache
- vomiting
- collapse and seizure
- coma leading to death

How is it treated?

- call an ambulance
- ensure complete rest, in shade
- remove clothing
- cool the person using ice packs to neck, groin and armpits
- cover them with a wet sheet and fan to increase cooling
- give fluids if they're conscious

Fractures

What is a simple fracture?

A simple fracture doesn't pierce the skin although if not looked after, it can become a compound fracture.

Tell tale signs

- swelling around the affected area
- possible discoloration of the skin
- tenderness and pain in the area
- loss of mobility in the limb
- the patient feeling or hearing a bone snap

How is a simple fracture treated?

Basic care and treatment relies on immobilisation and splinting of the injury.

Finger - strap broken finger to adjacent finger

Lower arm - splint entire forearm and immobilise in a sling

Upper arm - place arm in a sling and bandage upper arm to chest

Leg -splint leg or strap legs together if patient can be carried

Use your imagination if you need a splint. A straight piece of wood, a rolled up newspaper or magazine, even a rolled up blanket will do! The main aim is to keep the limb as immobile and comfortable as possible. Make sure the splint extends beyond both sides of the fracture and carefully elevate the limb to slow bloodflow to the wound.

What is a compound fracture?

A compound fracture pierces the skin which can result in serious bleeding. Do not apply pressure to a compound fracture to stop the bleeding.

How is a compound fracture treated?

- cover the injured part with a sterile pad
- apply a splint to keep the bone from causing further injury to the surrounding tissues
- get medical help
- avoid moving the person but keep them warm, comfortable and reassured.

Sprains

What is a sprain?

A sprain is a tear of the ligaments attached to a joint. It can also include blood vessel, nerve and tendon damage. As ankles are the most common sprains, avoid removing boots until the sprain can be treated.

What are the symptoms?

- sudden pain
- loss of weight-bearing ability
- bruising
- swelling
- tenderness in the area

How are sprains treated?

- rest the injury
- apply ice or a cold compress for 10 minutes

- support with a firm elastic bandage
- elevate the limb

Bleeding

What do I do first?

1. wipe away blood to inspect the wound.
2. apply direct pressure with a bandage or wad of clothing. If the blood soaks through, apply another bandage ON TOP of the first one.
3. lie the patient down
4. elevate the area above the heart, to reduce blood flow.

Pressure points

If the wound is still bleeding excessively use pressure points - press the artery closest to the wound between your fingers and the bone behind the artery. This may require the heel of your hand. *Tourniquet - yes or no?* Only use a tourniquet when everything else has failed and the patient's life is at stake as it can result in the patient losing the limb altogether.

Burns

How are burns treated?

The faster a burn is treated the less severe it may be.

- apply cold water immediately, preferably fully emerging the burned area for at least 15 minutes.
- remove any burnt clothing unless it is stuck to the skin
- leave blisters intact
- cover with a clean non-adherent burn dressing

When should I get help?

Seek medical help when

- it's a child or elderly person,
- it covers more than one body part
- it's on a sensitive area such as hand, face or foot

- it's third degree (the burn is through the third layer of skin, giving a whitish or charred appearance)
- it's caused by chemicals
- the person is in shock

What should I put on a burn?

- clean non-adherent burn dressing
- antiseptic fluid, for minor burns only

DO NOT put butter or greasy ointments on a burn. They seal heat into the wound and can cause infection.

Insect bites

What should I do if there is an allergic reaction?

The greatest risk from insect bites is an allergic reaction. Use antihistamine lotion (or tablets) to treat mild reactions. If you know you require medication for allergic reactions, make sure you carry it with you at all times.

What helps with the itching? Tea-tree oil and antihistamines help control itching.

How should I remove a bee sting?

A bee sting will usually cause pain, swelling and itching. However, a severe allergic reaction in some people can result in respiratory failure and cardiac arrest. In these cases apply pressure immobilisation and get medical help immediately.

Otherwise:

1. remove the sting by scraping it with a knife edge or fingernail.
2. apply a cold compress
3. use antihistamine lotion or tablets, if available

DO NOT squeeze the area around the sting as this only injects more venom into the person

Ticks

Where do they hide?

Unfortunately ticks are very difficult to see so each night conduct a thorough self-examination, especially around your groin and armpits. Children are most at risk, and

should be double-checked in susceptible areas as well as behind the ears and the back of the neck.

What are the symptoms of tick bite? These generally develop over several days but allergic reactions can occur rapidly.

General symptoms include

- local irritation
- lethargy
- muscle weakness
- unsteady movement
- double vision
- breathing or swallowing difficulties

Allergic reactions may include rapid local swelling, wheezing and breathing difficulties and collapse.

How are they removed?

1. spray with tick repellent or swab with kerosene, if available
2. remove with tweezers by grabbing the tick as close as possible to where it is joined to the skin and pull gently upwards, ensuring you do not leave the head
3. wash the area thoroughly and apply antiseptic cream
4. check the whole body for further ticks

The essential first aid kit

What should it contain?

- bandaids in a variety of sizes
- sterile wound dressings
- bandages (crepe and elastic)
- antiseptic fluid (Dettol or Betadine)
- eyebath and eye drops
- cotton tips / wool
- adhesive surgical tape
- thermometer
- scissors
- safety pins
- tweezers
- 30+ SPF sunscreen
- insect repellent
- insect bite lotion (Stingose or calamine lotion)

- pain relief tablets
- antihistamine tablets
- tea-tree oil

Remember to update or replace items before each trip.