

## Wilderness First Aid

**Prepackaged first-aid kits take the guesswork out of what supplies you need—but you also must know how to use them.**

**M**any Boy Scout and Venturing leaders can navigate with map and compass, pick a good campsite, and pitch a tent—not to mention whip up gourmet meals and wow audiences with campfire tall tales.

But do you know what to do if a hiker falls and dislocates a shoulder? Is no longer breathing? Can't move her legs? Do your first-aid kits contain the supplies to keep a seriously injured person alive? Can you manage an emergency when help is many hours away?

Whether on a day hike or a two-week expedition, a unit's adult leaders are responsible for the group. Fortunately, the most serious injuries you're likely to encounter are scraped knees and blistered toes. But anyone leading a wilderness trip needs to be confident and competent in managing emergencies.

### Wilderness first-aid training

The first step: Take a class—but not just any class. The BSA encourages leaders to complete Wilderness First Aid Basics, a 16-hour course recently developed by the American Red Cross.

"The primary difference between a standard first-aid course and a wilderness course is learning what to do when help from trained emergency medical personnel is delayed," says John Hendrickson of the American Red Cross.

"In places where emergency medical services are close by, you need to know how to stabilize the victim and keep him alive until help arrives, which is

usually a short amount of time. In wilderness, there are additional and sometimes different procedures because you may have to wait a long time for help, or move the victim over a long distance."

Also, wilderness first-aid courses stress the injuries you're most likely to encounter in the backcountry. You'll spend less time learning what to do if a 3-year-old swallows drain cleaner and more time on splinting broken arms, treating hypothermia, and recognizing dehydration.

### First-aid kits

Each member of your group should have a small personal first-aid kit consisting of adhesive bandages, any medications they usually take, and blister treatment. They should store these personal items in zipper-locking plastic bags to protect them from moisture.

The group leader is responsible for making sure there's also a larger first-aid kit with the kinds of supplies you hope you won't need.

It's possible to assemble your own first-aid kit, but prepackaged kits designed for wilderness use offer many advantages. They can be more economical because they contain measured quantities of supplies, and most include a small instructional first-aid

booklet. And they reduce the chance you'll forget anything important.

You'll find prepacked first-aid kits in outfitting stores. OR (Outdoor Research) offers a range of kits, from the Hiker, a personal kit (9 ounces, \$36), to the Expedition, for full-fledged expeditions (3 pounds 6 ounces, \$190). The Guide medical kit (2 pounds 2 ounces, \$110) seems tailor-made for Scout leaders, containing enough oft-used supplies such as adhesive bandages to last a group for a week.

Adventure Medical Kits of Oakland, Calif., offers a wide range of backcountry first-aid kits. The Trail kit is for personal use (12 ounces, \$19.99). The larger Fundamentals kit is suitable for groups of eight people for an outing as long as two weeks (1 pound 8 ounces, \$79.95).

Because no prepackaged first-aid kit is perfect for everyone's needs, you may want to supplement the contents.

OR's Guide kit, for instance, doesn't contain two items I consider indispensable in the backcountry: Second Skin (a Spenco product for treating blisters) and cortisone cream, to relieve chafing rashes and bug bites. (Cortisone cream is, however, available in OR's Expedition kit).

Even if you have a top-quality first-aid kit, do you know how to use every-

thing in it? EMT shears, splinter forceps, a hemostat, and a needle-and-suture set can be lifesaving—or useless.

Review the kit's contents before every trip. Moisture and heat can destroy adhesives, so replace supplies that look like they've got a few too many trail miles. Finally, add items based on your own experience. John Hendrickson, for example, recommends carrying a space blanket on day hikes to treat hypothermia.

### Personal medical sheets

Leaders should carry a personal health

form for each youth participant. This includes a medical history, insurance information, doctor's phone numbers, and a signed parental consent for treatment.

Parents should provide a list of medication their child is taking and note whether they need to be taken before, after, or with food. (Such requirements may affect your snacking and eating schedule.)

Ask if any group members have allergies, especially to bee stings. If so, be sure you have appropriate emergency supplies, like epinephrine.

Finally, a cell phone can have a place in an emergency kit. But check whether 911 is the correct emergency number, because in some remote areas, cell phones do not plug into the emergency response system. Also, cell phones often don't work in remote areas where signals may not carry. ☺

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The Fundamentals first-aid kit, opened above (Adventure Medical Kits), contains enough supplies for a group of eight people on a two-week trip. Adventure Medical's Trail kit and Outdoor Research's Hiker kit are well stocked for personal use. *Mountaineering First Aid* (\$10.95, The Mountaineers) is a supplemental text for the American Red Cross Wilderness First Aid Basics course. The book includes the latest information on assessing and treating accidents and illnesses in the outdoors.