

# WILDERNESS EMERGENCY FIRST AID CHECKLIST

Plan ahead • Treat within your training • Know when to call for help

Use this checklist before a trip and as a quick field reference when an injury occurs. Your preparation should reflect where you're going, how long you'll be out, what you're doing, and how difficult it would be to reach professional help.

## STEP 1 - PLAN FOR THE TRIP

- Identify the route, distance, terrain, weather, and likely hazards.
- Consider how remote the area is and how difficult evacuation would be.
- Decide what medical supplies are appropriate for the activity and group.
- Pack personal medications and relevant medical information.
- Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Know how you will communicate if cell service is unavailable.
- Carry navigation, light, signaling, shelter, water, and emergency supplies appropriate to the trip.

## STEP 2 - BUILD THE MEDICAL KIT

- Adhesive bandages and sterile gauze.
- Medical tape and wound-cleaning supplies.
- Nitrile gloves and basic protective equipment.
- Tweezers and small scissors.
- Elastic wrap or other appropriate support supplies.
- Blister and foot-care supplies.
- Personal medications and emergency medications as appropriate.
- Emergency blanket or bivy.
- Add specialized supplies only when justified by the trip, environment, or your training.

## STEP 3 - WHEN SOMEONE GETS HURT

- **STOP:** Make sure the scene is reasonably safe before approaching.
- **ASSESS:** Check responsiveness, breathing, severe bleeding, and other immediate threats to life.
- **STABILIZE:** Provide care within your level of training and protect the patient from further injury and exposure.
- **COMMUNICATE:** Activate emergency assistance early when the situation warrants it.
- **EVACUATE:** Decide whether the patient can safely move or whether rescuers should come to the patient.

## STEP 4 - STAY PUT OR MOVE?

- Stay put when the location is reasonably safe and movement could worsen a potentially serious injury.
- Minimize unnecessary movement after a potentially serious head, neck, or spinal injury.
- Movement may become necessary if remaining in place creates an immediate threat to life.
- If the patient cannot safely walk, treat the situation as an evacuation problem rather than assuming they should be carried.
- Consider terrain, weather, available help, communication, and the risk of making the injury worse.

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## STEP 5 - INFORMATION FOR RESCUERS

- Your location and GPS coordinates, if available.
- Trail, route, campsite, landmark, or best access point.
- What happened and when it happened.
- Number of patients.
- Patient condition and major symptoms.
- Known medical conditions, allergies, or medications when known.
- First aid already provided.
- Equipment and resources available.
- Weather, terrain, wildlife, fire, water, or other hazards.
- Any significant change in the patient's condition.

## STEP 6 - COMMON WILDERNESS PROBLEMS

- **Severe bleeding:** Apply appropriate bleeding-control measures within your training and activate emergency help.
- **Minor wounds:** Clean appropriately, cover, and monitor for worsening symptoms.
- **Fractures:** Protect and immobilize when appropriate; do not force a deformed limb back into position.
- **Head/neck/back injury:** Minimize unnecessary movement unless the scene is dangerous.
- **Snakebite:** Keep the person calm and still, seek medical attention promptly, and avoid cutting the wound, sucking venom, ice, or folk remedies.
- **Heat illness:** Stop activity, move to a cooler environment when safe, begin cooling, and treat suspected heat stroke as an emergency.
- **Hypothermia:** Protect from wind and precipitation, replace wet clothing when practical, and add dry insulation.
- **Frostbite:** Protect the area, avoid rubbing or massaging it, and seek medical care.
- **Dehydration:** Address fluid needs early and reassess the person's condition.

## STEP 7 - WHILE WAITING FOR RESCUE

- Continue appropriate first aid within your level of training.
- Monitor responsiveness and breathing.
- Monitor severe or worsening bleeding.
- Protect the patient from heat, cold, wind, rain, and other exposure.
- Keep the patient calm and as comfortable as practical.
- Keep rescuers updated if the patient's condition changes.
- Make the location identifiable to rescuers when appropriate.
- Do not leave the patient simply to search for help unless the situation requires it.

## STEP 8 - FINAL PACK CHECK

- First-aid kit appropriate for the trip.
- Emergency blanket or bivvy.
- Extra clothing appropriate to expected conditions.
- Water plus water-treatment capability.
- Navigation backup.

- Light and backup power or batteries.
- Whistle or signaling device.
- Communication device appropriate to the area.
- Emergency food for unexpected delays.
- Personal medications and emergency information.

**REMEMBER:** This checklist is a preparedness aid, not a substitute for first-aid or wilderness medical training. For a serious or potentially life-threatening emergency, activate professional emergency assistance as early as possible and follow instructions from qualified medical professionals or rescuers.

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