

WILDERNESS TRAIL INJURY & RESCUE CHECKLIST

Assess danger | Contact rescuers | Prevent exposure | Wait safely

When a hiker cannot safely walk out, prioritize scene safety, urgent medical needs, emergency communication, and preventing additional harm. Follow dispatcher instructions.

1. CHECK THE SCENE

- ☐ Stop. Look for rockfall, unstable slopes, water, traffic, severe weather, or other hazards.
- ☐ Keep yourself and companions safe; do not create another injured person.
- ☐ Avoid unnecessary movement. Move someone only if an immediate danger makes staying unsafe.

2. ASSESS URGENT MEDICAL NEEDS

- ☐ Check responsiveness and normal breathing; call emergency services for serious concerns.
- ☐ Look for severe bleeding, breathing trouble, confusion, major injury, or rapid deterioration.
- ☐ Provide first aid only within your training and follow emergency dispatcher guidance.
- ☐ Do not ask an injured hiker to stand or walk to test a potentially serious injury.

3. CALL FOR HELP & SHARE LOCATION

- ☐ Call 911 in the U.S. when emergency assistance is needed; use available emergency SOS.
- ☐ Give trail name, GPS coordinates and format, landmarks, group size, and injury details.
- ☐ Share hazards, weather, callback details, and any changes in the injured person.
- ☐ If available, activate a registered PLB only for a genuine emergency.

4. DECIDE WHETHER TO STAY OR MOVE

- ☐ Remain in a reasonably safe location when movement may worsen an injury.
- ☐ If immediate hazards force relocation, minimize movement and seek dispatcher guidance.

WAITING FOR RESCUE & OVERNIGHT READINESS

Protect the injured person | Stay organized | Make yourself findable

Rescue may be delayed by terrain, weather, darkness, and distance. Monitor the injured person, protect against exposure, and avoid unnecessary risks.

5. PROTECT FROM EXPOSURE

- ☐ Add dry insulation and block wind or rain; insulate from cold ground when possible.
- ☐ Provide shade and ventilation in heat; avoid overheating.
- ☐ Bring protection to the person rather than moving a seriously injured person for comfort.
- ☐ An emergency bivy helps with exposure but is not lightning-safe shelter.

6. ORGANIZE COMPANIONS & SUPPLIES

- ☐ Assign communication, monitoring, weather watch, and supply tasks as appropriate.
- ☐ Keep phone, headlamp, first-aid kit, shelter, water, and signaling tools accessible.
- ☐ Do not separate the group without weighing injury, route, weather, daylight, and rescue advice.
- ☐ Offer food or water only when the person is alert and can swallow safely, and responders advise it is appropriate.

7. SIGNAL & COMMUNICATE

- ☐ Use whistle, bright clothing, flashlight, or signaling equipment when safe.
- ☐ Keep location updates accurate; tell rescuers before relocating if possible.
- ☐ Avoid dangerous terrain, uncontrolled fires, and exhausting shouting to attract attention.

8. PREPARE FOR A LONG WAIT

- ☐ Continue monitoring breathing, responsiveness, and important condition changes.
- ☐ Prepare headlamps and insulating layers before darkness; conserve battery power.
- ☐ Do not attempt risky improvised evacuation, unnecessary shelter building, or extra travel.

EMERGENCY REMINDER

This checklist supports preparation; it does not replace medical training or professional care. In a medical emergency, contact local emergency services.