

No One Is Coming to Save You. A User's Guide to First Aid Kits

One of my first responder buddies often says, "When a medical or law enforcement professional is needed in seconds, we are only minutes away." It's true. First responders are typically not the first ones on the scene of a medical ailment or injury. You are. That's why it's imperative that you get good first aid training and a reliable first aid kit. First aid kits are an essential part of emergency preparedness. However, not all first aid kits are created equal, nor should they be. There are numerous pre-made kits available, each specialized for different activities. In this article, I am going to explore the diversity of carrying and organizing kits.

Basic First Aid (aka Boo-Boo Kits): Notice I said "kits" in the subtitle, not "kit." That was purposeful because you will need multiple kits and place them in locations where they are likely to be used. Start with medical gloves, adhesive bandages (I prefer the flexible kind), tape, and antiseptic squeeze bottles or wipes. These items are compact enough to put one in a glove box, go-bag or backpack, or in the kitchen cabinet next to the knives. This type of kit will take care of the minor injuries that we all get from time to time, especially if we use knives or do manual work. It will help you clean basic small wounds, stop bleeding, and protect against infection. I recommend using a zippered or resealable pouch that is waterproof for this type of kit. Trust me, you'll appreciate it when it rains, and your kit remains dry.

Home First Aid Kit

This kit is typically not meant to be portable but should be kept in a designated area of your house, such as a cabinet or pantry. Even though we live in a fast-paced world where we are constantly on the move, the majority of our lives are still spent at home. Therefore, it's important to have a robust kit readily available. Include over-the-counter medicines and prescription medicines, clearly marked for each person. Also, keep cold packs in the freezer, burn gels, eye cleaning solutions, and even a good massage tool for muscle soreness. This kit should be able to handle slightly more extensive burns, injuries, and ailments. It's meant for situations where it's best to stay at home and take care of yourself without intervention from others.

Vehicle Kits

It may surprise you, but I carry three different first aid "kits" in my vehicle. Before you think I'm going overboard, let me explain. We are more likely to need a trauma kit in a vehicle than anywhere else. Almost all of us will be involved in or near a vehicle crash at some point, where medical intervention may save lives. So why not be prepared? A vehicle trauma kit should include at least one tourniquet, H and H dressing, chest seals, hemostatic dressing packs, and other trauma medicine supplies if you are trained to use them (that is a hint to get Stop The Bleed training). I would also consider a ResQMe device or similar. Where you place these kits is nearly as important as what is in them. You should have two trauma kits within arm's reach of the people in the front seats, often attached to a visor or stabilizer handle in the vehicle. In the

event of a wreck, this means you can possibly reach these items if you cannot remove yourself from the car. Think of a large arterial bleed on one of your legs due to the accident, but you cannot get out of the car because your legs are trapped. My third kit in the vehicle is an extensive kit similar to the items I have in my house, but mobile. It includes additional supplies such as SAM splints, extra tourniquets, 4x4 dressings, a stethoscope, pulse oximeter, and over-the-counter medications for allergies, pain, and acid reflux. I also include some glucose "shots" for those with low blood sugar and an epi-pen for family members with allergic reactions to stings. I even include another basic first aid kit inside this larger kit. It's important to carry these supplies in a hard case that is waterproof, allowing you to be rough with and around the case while keeping all your supplies secure and dry.

Wilderness Survival Kit

The last kit I will discuss is a wilderness kit. In a wilderness setting, you are likely to be far away from immediate medical help, so being prepared is crucial. The main difference here is that in other situations, you can usually expect someone to reach you soon, but that might not be the case in the wilderness. Therefore, it's necessary to have a few additional items. While the line between first aid and survival items may blur, it's important to have what you need for your safety. The three most common injuries in the backcountry, according to the Wilderness Medicine Society, are below-the-knee injuries, cuts, and burns. For splinting an ankle, carry supplies such as a SAM splint, or improvise with items like a jacket or shirt to pad the injury and sticks from your surroundings to help stabilize it. Secure everything with duct tape. For cuts, have 4x4 gauze (cut it smaller for small cuts) and duct tape. Burns, often caused by backpacker stoves and boiling water, require burn cream and gauze to keep the area clean until further help can be reached. Additionally, keep trauma supplies on your person within easy reach. Carry essential supplies on a chest kit or belt and more extensive supplies in your backpack. For those who are tactically-minded, a waist belt with a medical pouch on the small of your back works well.

Having a first aid kit is not enough; it is essential to receive proper training to effectively use the supplies. Basic first aid training and Stop the Bleed training are highly recommended. As you continue to develop your skills and gear, ensure that you have a reliable source for acquiring supplies.