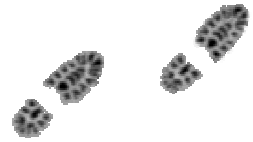


# The Right Stuff - Medical Emergencies

by

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If we hike long enough we will eventually be faced with dealing with a medical emergency. Our response to this situation will be determined by our preparedness for it. The best thing that we can carry with us is knowledge and we can gain this knowledge from courses such as wilderness first aid, reading books and articles on the subject and experience.

First aid courses are readily available and more organizations are putting on wilderness courses – take one! The first aid book that I use is the Saint John Ambulance Official Wilderness First-Aid Guide and I will use it extensively in this article. Experience in these matters is a little harder to come by, but the wilderness first aid courses usually have an outdoors, hands-on segment. As day hikers we have to look at what are the most common emergencies that we will be required to deal with. I'll list some but you can probably think of more.

## Common Emergencies for Day Hikers

- broken bones
- insect bites
- strains/sprains
- hypothermia
- cuts/abrasions
- eye injuries
- dehydration
- heat exhaustion/sun stroke
- heart attack/stroke

Once we have a medical emergency we must consider the following.

### BREATHING PROBLEMS

Generally the best position for the injured person is the “recovery position” (on his side) with the airway clear. If there is trouble breathing in this position consider “semi sitting”.

### COLD/EXPOSURE

The injured person is vulnerable to hypothermia and must be protected from the elements. Use a “sit upons” (closed cell foam pads) under the person, add clothing and some shelter over the person [i.e. a “space blanket” or fly sheet].

### SHOCK

Interruption of our normal breathing and circulation can lead to shock in an injured person. Stop any bleeding and provide a comfortable, reassuring environment with the legs raised.

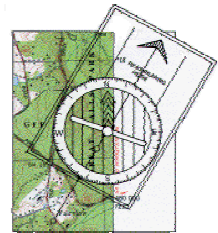
### DEHYDRATION

Provide sufficient water to the injured person. This condition is best avoided by keeping yourself well hydrated during all outdoor activities.

Management of the scene is very important. The person in charge must look at what resources he has available and the location. It is usually better if the person in charge does just that, directs others. Who in the group has medical training? What first aid supplies are available? What shelter is available? Is a cell phone available? Where exactly are we? Who are strong hikers to go for aid? What needs to be done for the safety of the rest of the group?

### What can we learn from the above list?

- Know your group.
- Carry a good map and know where you are.
- Carry a cell phone.
- Carry first aid supplies.



Continued

If there are sufficient hikers do not leave the injured person alone and when sending for aid send three or four, these hikers should carry a cell phone, map and whistle. All hikers are to be encouraged to carry a whistle and know the code- see table below.

One blast  STOP	Two blasts  COME TO ME	Three blasts  COME TO ME, QUICKLY
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I am often asked, "What should a first aid kit contain?" The easiest solution is to carry a made up, packaged kit such as the Saint John Ambulance Fanny Pack, which can treat small and medium wounds and costs about \$25.00. Then add to it items such as latex gloves, space blanket, Swiss Army knife with scissors and tweezers and tensor bandages (for knees and wrists). It is your responsibility to look at your own medical history and problems that you may develop and carry those special supplies you need. Items that are consumed frequently such as Band-Aids, moleskin and aspirin or Tylenol are best kept in a separate small kit so they can be accessed with disturbing your main kit. Finally, don't forget to check your kit periodically and replace any items that have been consumed or have deteriorated.

Hike safely but Hike!

Greg Vincent

Note:

This article appeared in the Newsletter of the [Grand Valley Trails Association](http://www.gvta.on.ca). It was reformatted for this article and for the GVTA website ( <http://www.gvta.on.ca> ). Greg is a very experienced hike leader and instructor. He has been a longtime member of the [Bruce Trail Association](#) and serves on the GVTA Board of Directors. In his spare time Greg teaches hiking and map and compass courses through the Adult and Continuing Education division of the Waterloo Region District School Board.