



happier accidents

What do you get when you combine the great outdoors, sunny skies, and free time?

Fun, for sure. But also cuts, scrapes, sprains, or worse. Here, your ultimate guide to managing the most common medical mishaps that come along with summer.

1 | “Ouch! I just tripped and rolled over my ankle.”

If you're still able to walk, albeit a bit uncomfortably, then relax: It's not a fracture but simply a sprain. That means a ligament has been stretched or, in more severe cases, torn. About 65 to 75 percent of ankle injuries fall into this category, says David A. Porter, M.D., Ph.D., an orthopedic foot and ankle surgeon at Methodist Sports Medicine, in Indianapolis. Reduce any swelling as soon as possible with RICE: *rest*, *ice*, *compression* (see Sprained Ankle, page 135), and *elevation* (recline on a chair and raise your ankle to above hip level). Ice in 10- to 20-minute intervals, with 10-minute breaks in between, for a few hours. Continue RICE intermittently (or whenever you feel pain) for the next few days, and wear only sneakers. The soreness and swelling should go away within a week or at most four weeks. (During this time, the doctor may send you for physical therapy.) If your ankle swells dramatically within the first hour after the injury (for instance, it may look as if a golf ball-size lump is lodged under your skin, or the entire ankle area may be puffy and purple) and you find it almost impossible to walk, you may have a more serious sprain or fracture. See your doctor within 48 hours. He may prescribe physical therapy and outfit you with a walking boot or a brace or, in the case of a broken bone, recommend surgery or a cast.



2 | “The mosquito bite that I got the other day is red and painful.”

You’ve been scratching it, right? When you do that, you can break the skin on the bite, allowing bacteria from your fingernails or the environment to cause an infection, says Jeffrey Pellegrino, Ph.D., a member of the American Red Cross Scientific Advisory Council. Fortunately, unless you’re in the tropics, it’s unlikely to be malaria or yellow fever. Keep the bite clean by washing it once or twice a day with soap and water;

the irritation should clear up in a few days. See a doctor if you contract flu-like symptoms (a possible, though still not probable, sign of a mosquito-borne illness) or if the red area gets bigger (a potential symptom of a more serious skin infection requiring antibiotic treatment). To tell definitively if the area has become enlarged, trace its periphery with a ballpoint pen at the first sign of irritation. That way, you will be able to tell if it really grows.

3 | “I was slicing a watermelon and cut my hand with the knife.”

Resist your natural instinct to rinse the open cut under running water immediately. Washing a still bleeding gash will flush away natural clotting agents in the blood and cause it to gush even more. (The same rule does *not* apply to minor cuts that are smaller than an inch long.) Instead, grab a gauze pad or a clean dish towel and apply hard pressure to the gash for 10 minutes, which should be enough time to stop

WRAP SHEET

Think bandaging a sprain is a pain? Not so with these easy how-tos. (Everything you need is in your first-aid kit.)

SPRAINED FINGER



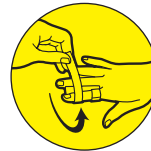
STEP 1

Apply ½-inch strips of medical tape above and below the injured joint.



STEP 2

Place a thin strip of padded foam between the injured finger and the adjacent one.



STEP 3

Use two strips of medical tape to bind both fingers together. Be sure to keep both digits in a relaxed position.

the bleeding. Then hold your hand under running water for 10 minutes. Keep it bandaged with gauze and tape until it heals. If you take blood thinners (such as daily aspirin or warfarin) and can’t control the bleeding, or if the cut is gaping open more than half an inch, you may need a few stitches. Keep pressure on the wound and head to the ER.

4 | “My friend got hit in the head with a baseball.”

Baseball, soccer ball, lacrosse stick. The rule is the same for all head traumas: If the person is vomiting, too dizzy to walk, or unconscious for any period of time, take him to the ER to determine the need for medical tests that check for internal bleeding or other significant injury, says Howard Mell, M.D., a spokesperson for the American College of Emergency Physicians and a former paramedic. Even if the person is walking and talking just fine, he should sit out the rest of the game. Watch him for signs of headache, confusion, blurry vision, irritability, memory loss, sensitivity to light or noise, and sleepiness, says Nick Wetjen, a pediatric neurosurgeon at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota: “You can be awake and still have a concussion.”

Continue monitoring your friend for three weeks, in case he has a post-concussive disorder, says Mell. The symptoms resemble those of a regular concussion but may not show up for 24 to 72 hours and typically continue for several weeks.

Q Should I call an ambulance?

A. In most cases, yes. It’s not safe to drive if you’re injured or panicked or if the person in trouble is seriously ill. Plus, the average ambulance response time is just eight minutes, according to the 2012 National EMS Database. Few people can get to the ER faster than that. Of course, there’s also the cost to consider. While all insurance plans cover ambulances, most pay more of the overall fee when the emergency is serious (chest pain, major bleeding) as opposed to painful but non-life-threatening (a broken toe, an itchy rash). To determine the most that you could owe, simply add your plan’s deductible amount to its out-of-pocket maximum.



5 | “I just grabbed a hot grill pan with my bare hands!”

Ignore the urge to reach for ice cubes. Burned skin is fragile, and the extreme cold of the ice can worsen the injury. Instead, run cool water over your hands for 15 to 20 minutes to stop the burning process and to reduce pain, swelling, and the risk of scarring, says Pellegrino. That may sound like a long time, but any less and your burn may reach deeper tissues. Head to the doctor if your entire palm is affected or if you see signs of a second-degree burn (blisters, swelling, or exposure of white layers of tissue). Otherwise gently blot the skin dry and loosely cover the burn with a sterile gauze bandage. (Don't use cotton or you may get lint in the wound.) Then take an over-the-counter pain reliever, if necessary. Skip ointments and salves (including Grandma's favorite, butter), says Pellegrino. These are oil-based and can trap heat in the wound. Replace the bandage once a day until the burn heals (usually within six days). Rinse the burn gently with soap and water each time you uncover it.

Almost 30 percent of patients seeking medical attention after a cat bite to their hands end up needing hospitalization to treat infection.

6 | “The neighbor’s cat bit my hand—hard.”

Rinse the injury with soap and water. Then keep an eye on it. If pain, redness, or swelling increases over the next few hours or days, let your doctor know what happened and get his first available appointment. If he doesn't have any immediate openings (say, he's putting you off for a few days), proceed to the emergency room. According to a recently published study in *The Journal of Hand Surgery*, almost 30 percent of patients who seek medical attention after a cat bite to their hands end up needing hospitalization (and often surgery) to treat infection. Many of the rest require oral antibiotics on an outpatient basis. The reason: Unlike dog bites, which often create open wounds

that are easier to clean and allow for drainage, cat bites tend to be deep, narrow, and hard to reach. Plus, “the joints and tendons in the hand are close to the skin and contain fluid that can act as a breeding ground for bacteria,” says Brian T. Carlsen, a hand surgeon at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. “That makes hands particularly susceptible to infection.”

7 | “My two-year-old niece has a horrible sunburn.”

If she is dizzy, weak, sick to her stomach, or spiking a high fever—or if the burn is severe (oozing blisters form within 48 hours) and covering a large portion of her body, like her entire back and legs—take her to the ER. A doctor will check her heart rate, blood pressure, and other vital signs and determine a treatment, such as pain medication or creams. If her only symptoms are discomfort and redness, apply cool compresses (for 10 to 15 minutes, twice a day) and aloe vera lotion and give her children's ibuprofen (such as Advil, which is anti-inflammatory, unlike acetaminophen). Avoid lotions with petroleum, which can cause infection, or anything ending in *-caine* (benzocaine, lidocaine). When not administered by a profes-

sional, these drugs may be dangerous. She should feel better in a few days.

8 | “I scraped my arm on a metal fence.”

Cleanse badly broken skin with soap and running warm water. If you haven't had a booster shot for tetanus within the past 10 years or you can't remember the last time you had one, head straight to an urgent-care clinic to get a shot. Tetanus isn't caused by the metal itself but by bacteria transmitted by dust, animal feces, or saliva. These bacteria can be found on all sorts of surfaces, from an iron fence to a wooden bench, says Shawna Mudd, a nurse practitioner and an assistant professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, in Baltimore. A tetanus infection can be extremely serious, causing severe illness and, in rare cases, death, so don't delay. If you are up-to-date on the vaccine and you don't think you need stitches, simply bandage the cut and keep a close eye on it. If the pain persists for hours or the wound grows warm or red, there's a slight chance that you could be developing a different (that is, non-tetanus) infection. See your doctor as soon as possible to find out if you need antibiotics or stitches.

SPRAINED WRIST



STEP 1

Starting a few inches below the wrist, wrap a compression bandage around the forearm and move toward the hand.



STEP 2

Wrap the bandage diagonally across the palm between the thumb and the forefinger.



STEP 3

Move back toward the forearm and secure the bandage with metal or elastic clips.

Q Is there any value in letting a cut “air out,” like Mom said?

A. To air is human. To cover? Divine! “Wounds usually heal best in a clean, moist environment,” says Shawna Mudd, a nurse practitioner at Johns Hopkins Hospital, in Baltimore. “Open wounds are potentially at greater risk of infection and scarring when compared with clean, covered wounds.” But that doesn't mean that you should stick with a single, solitary bandage. Put on a new one every day until the wound heals fully. (The time varies, but five days is about average.) And don't be deterred when your skin gets that pale, shriveled look; Mudd promises that it will revert to normal. And, hey, that's better than an unsightly scab.



emergency!

Someday you may find yourself in the ER. Learn how to navigate it with the tips at realsimple.com/hospital.



9 | “I cut my foot on a piece of glass at the beach.”

Ask yourself, Am I up-to-date on my tetanus shot? If not, go to the ER or an urgent-care clinic to ensure that the wound doesn't get infected. All set on the shots? Then try to remove the glass. If it comes out easily, simply clean the wound with soap and running water for 10 minutes, stop the bleeding with direct pressure, cover with a waterproof bandage, and get back to having fun. If you can't get the glass out but can feel it under your skin and it hurts, go to the ER or an urgent-care center. And if you can't remove the glass but you're not in pain, go ahead and wash with soap and water, slap on a bandage, and carry on. The glass may slide out on its own with your activities, says Mell. Remove the bandage once your foot feels normal again. If the glass never appears but you see signs of infection (pus, warmth, increased pain), ask your doctor to fit you in as soon as possible.

WEIRD-LOOKING BANDAGES, DEMYSTIFIED

- A | butterfly closure**
FOR: Small, deep incisions or jagged cuts on relatively flat surfaces, such as the legs and the arms. TO USE: Place the skinny central strip directly over the cut, with the ends aligned on each side. The setup pulls the edges of the wound together, minimizing scarring.
- B | fingertip bandage**
FOR: Cuts on the tips of the fingers and toes. TO USE: Place the narrow center section over the edge of the fingernail, then pull the panels over the nail and the finger pad.
- C | gauze pad**
FOR: Sensitive cuts, scrapes, and burns. The layered design protects wounds from outside pressure. TO USE: Cover the cut with the pad. Use adhesive bandage tape to secure the pad to skin. (The tape should never touch the wound.)
- D | knuckle bandage**
FOR: Cuts on knuckles, elbows, and knees. TO USE: Holding the finger straight, position the bandage horizontally over the front of the knuckle. Wrap the H-shaped ends around the finger. (The centered openings on the ends allow the joint to bend.) For elbows and knees, stretch the entire bandage flat over the wound.
- E | clear spot bandage**
FOR: Tiny imperfections (bug bites, pimples). TO USE: Place directly over the mark.

SPRAINED ANKLE



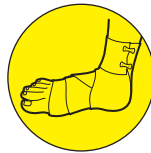
STEP 1

Bend the foot at a 90-degree angle. Wrap securely, but not uncomfortably, with a compression bandage, starting at the base of the toes and moving upward.



STEP 2

With each turn, overlap half of the previous layer. Continue up the leg to the midcalf.



STEP 3

Fasten with metal or elastic clips.

get the lowdown on emergency maneuvers

When a person stops breathing, you have to act fast. While someone calls 911, someone else should be administering the Heimlich maneuver if the victim is choking or hands-only cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) if he is passed out. For easy-to-follow tear-out instructions that you can keep in your wallet, turn to page 205.

Black beans get nutrition rolling.



Find them in the chip aisle.

