

## Building a First Aid Kit for your Boat

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Have you ever wondered what you would do if you had a serious injury or medical condition where you couldn't call 911?

Are you prepared to handle a major incident on board your boat?

Have you done everything possible to prevent any such unfortunate foreseeable event?

Building a personalized first aid kit for your boat is something you can do this month and should be checked each season before heading out to the lake. Bandages get wet or dry out. Medicines expire, tools get robbed for mechanical issues, etc, etc.

Building your own kit has many advantages. First, by building it yourself, you know what is there, and hopefully have put it in a place you will remember and can access easily when you need it. Secondly, you will have the tools and materials needed for the types of illnesses and injuries you are most likely to have to handle yourself on your boat with its unique capabilities.

Remember! Treatment is exponentially more painful, more expensive, risky, and resource intensive than prevention, preparation, and training. So let's get started!

Let's start with prevention! Take a CPR/first aid class! Wear your life jacket! Get adequate sleep! Hydrate! Bring cold, wind, and sun protection, and plan nutritious snacks (limes)

Check the weather! Be prepared for the worst conditions for your area.

Get to know your crew! Tell them if you have any special conditions. Exchange emergency contact information. Don't assume!

Bring a light source!

And ONE MORE TIME! Make a commitment to signing up for a First Aid/CPR class, Wilderness First Responder Course, or a Safety at Sea Course. This is by far the best way to increase your skills and confidence.

Now! Build a First aid kit

1. Determine how long you may be away from access to advanced medical care.
2. Choose a place where you are going to keep your kit so you can grab it quickly should you have to abandon your boat.

3. Select a container that is waterproof and yet easy to access. This can be anything from a ziplock bag to a pelican case. Be careful it's not so big that you take it off the boat because it's in the way!

Now, what do you need to make your life easier if the need arises?

1. Pain relievers, cold medication, fever medications, sea sickness remedies, sunscreen, lip screen, medications for constipation, diarrhea, allergies, heartburn, nausea, etc.
2. Personal medications and medical accessories and supplies for past or existing health issues. Diabetes, asthma, anaphylaxis, etc.
3. Tools: knife, watch or timer, headlamp, scissors, tweezers, hemostats, needles, paper clip, stapler, suture kits, safety pins, syringe, straw, maybe even a stethoscope and blood pressure cuff if you know how to use it, automatic one if you don't.  
Thermometers
4. Supplies: triangular bandages, ace wraps, tape, wound closure strips, gauze pads and gauze wraps, bandages, moleskin, non stick bandages, occlusive dressings, cotton bandana
5. Notepad and pencil, SOAP notes
6. First aid reference books: Marine Medicine, First Aid at Sea, Where There is no Doctor, Where There is no Dentist, NOLS Wilderness First Aid
7. Protective equipment: gloves, glasses, mask, CPR barrier valve, long sleeves and long pants. Poncho
8. Environmental protection: heavy duty 55 gallon trash bags, bivy bag, insulation pads (boat cushions?), plastic drop cloth, duct tape, cordage.
9. Electrolytes and heat generating liquids, not alcohol! Hot packs, cold packs
10. Antibiotic ointment, burn gels, activated charcoal. Anti itch cream. Anti fungal cream, yeast infection medications, tucks, dive medications, altitude medications, sea sickness medications, hydrogen peroxide, isopropyl alcohol, Vaseline, cough drops, aloe vera gel
11. Dental care: Cavit, floss, toothpicks, oil of cloves
12. Kid care: Comfort animal, crayons
13. Eye pads, cotton swabs, wooden tongue depressor, tourniquet
14. IV supplies if trained.
15. Foley catheters
16. Water purification
17. Ziplock bags

If you're going to be with other boats that may have people trained in advanced medical techniques, having your own tools and supplies could be helpful such as oxygen, airway management, spinal immobilization equipment, Gamow bag, hyperbaric chamber

Now organize it so you can find everything easily!

That's it! Congratulations, now you're one step ahead of Murphy's law!

Now let's practice!

1. Identify your highest medically trained person on board. That person just became unconscious! You have no idea why. Suddenly, you're the lead medic!
2. Check that the scene is safe!

### **SCENE SAFETY**

1. Am I safe? I'm #1
2. What about you? Fire? Carbon monoxide? Electrical shock, danger of falling, etc...
3. Not on me! Body substance isolation
4. Are there any more? Check for other victims
5. General impression. Dead or alive.

### **CHECK FOR LIFE THREATS!**

ABCDE

- A. Airway
- B. Breathing
- C. Circulation/Bleeding
- D. Disability (spine injuries)
- E. Environment

Intervene at each problem when you find it. Air goes in and out, blood goes round and round!  
Protect the patient from further harm. Keep them warm and dry!

Now do a more detailed exam from head to foot. You're a detective! Take vital signs! And look for medical bracelets, necklace or phone medical ID, get a focused medical history!

### **HEAD TO TOE EXAM**

LAF Look, Ask, Feel

HEENT head, ears, eyes, nose, and throat  
PERRL pupils equal round and react to light  
Shoulders  
Chest  
Abdomen divide into 4 parts  
Pelvis  
Extremities  
CSM circulation, sensation and motion  
Roll patient onto side  
Back of head  
Back of chest

Neck  
Spine  
Butt  
Back of extremities

#### VITAL SIGNS

Date  
Time  
LOR Level of responsiveness  
AVPU Alert and oriented to person, place, time, and event, Verbal, Pain, Unresponsive  
HR heart rate, rhythm, and quality  
RR respiratory rate, rhythm, and quality  
SCTM skin color, temperature, and moisture  
Blood pressure  
Pupils  
Temperature

#### **FOCUSED MEDICAL HISTORY**

##### SAMPLE

Symptoms  
Allergies  
Medications  
Pertinent relevant medical history  
Last intake and output  
Events leading up to now!

##### OPQRST

Onset  
Palliates/ provokes  
Quality  
Radiates/refers  
Severity 1-10  
Time

Make a list of problems

List solutions for each problem

Continue monitoring and plan ahead for possible complications

Make an evacuation decision. Is it necessary or unnecessary? Rapid or non-urgent. Consider resources needed to execute your evacuation if needed.

Communications plan  
Know your location  
Latitude and longitude

VHF channel 16

Sat phone  
Write down your sat phone number

Cell phone  
Know the number to call at your marina! Write down your cell phone number!

**HELPFUL LINKS:**

[NOLS.edu/WildernessFirstAid](https://www.nols.edu/WildernessFirstAid)

[AdventureMedicalKits.com/Marine](https://AdventureMedicalKits.com/Marine)

[Surviveoutdoorslonger.com](https://Surviveoutdoorslonger.com)