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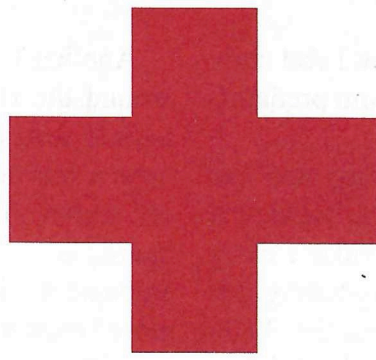
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# How To Make A Proper First-Aid Kit For The Backwoodsman

BY KEITH FARRAR

I have always taught wilderness survival based on “The Rule of 3’s,” because I feel that giving students a list of priorities to address was more educational than giving them a list of “gear” to carry. Teach them the priorities, then let them select the gear they are familiar with and comfortable using to address each priority. It’s the “give a man a fish” vs “teach a man to fish” way of teaching that I was going for.

Basically, I taught the priorities and demonstrated several items that can be used to address each priority. The students can then decide which items they think are best for them, or they can “step outside the box” and discover other items I may have not shown that can address a survival priority.

This system made it much easier for a student to put together a survival kit by simply going down the list of priorities and putting items in their kit to address each priority, and it also allowed them to look at the endless amount of new “survival” gear coming to market and decide if the item is a gimmick or a proper survival tool.

First-Aid kits are similar, as you must address category number one “life threatening injuries/conditions” first. Any

medical issue that can kill a person quickly must be addressed immediately and effectively before you go on to the “blister popping” part of first aid. This is mentioned in the “Rule of 3’s.” If you remember it’s “3 minutes without air.” While some survival instructors think this only relates to drowning, it actually relates to “Bodily Functions,” anything that can quickly end life must be addressed immediately!

Before we delve deeper into the actual First-Aid kit, there are things to consider.

You should have some first aid training (in person or even on-line training is critical to help with

your effectiveness to address medical issues). Basic First Aid/CPR is valuable training. Even better, is to continue with your education and move on to Wilderness First Aid, then Wilderness First Responder. All are very valuable for people that spend time in remote settings. The only downside to more medical education is, the more you know, the more you want to carry. This is opposite from what the famous wilderness survival instructor Mors Kochanski said, “the more you know, the less you carry,” as he related it to wilderness survival. While you



*Just some of the many containers to hold your first aid equipment.*



do learn ways to improvise as your medical training progresses, there are still items you will not want to leave behind. If you are a medical professional, EMT and above, you will most likely carry more medical gear than someone that has simply taken a basic first aid/CPR class.

The last part of medical training I would like to mention is to keep current with your training by refreshing at least every two years. This is a minimum! If you learn CPR today and never have to use it, odds are you will not be very effective at giving CPR a couple of years from now. In the meantime, consider this, studies have shown that imagining in your mind a particular task is almost as effective as actually doing the task, provided you are imagining it done correctly.

When I taught BLS (CPR for medical professionals) classes, I always told students to on occasion close their eyes and imagine going through the process of CPR, both alone, as well as 2-rescuer scenarios. This was particularly for the students who had jobs that required the BLS completion card, but would rarely, if ever, have to actually do CPR. This drill could help keep their performance tuned in.

Now, let's discuss the actual First-Aid kit. Keep in mind, your training may see slightly different items in your kit than what I suggest, however, the categories should be similar.

### **Category #1 - Your Rapid Response Kit**

The Rapid Response Kit addresses "Life Threatening issues". This is the part of your first aid kit you will grab first when dealing with a life-threatening situation that can lead to death quickly. Typically, the MARCH algorithm is followed in any program (past basic first aid) to address life threatening issues, follow the order listed below:

**M**- Massive Hemorrhage (severe bleeding must be controlled quickly).

**A**- Airway (a closed airway from injury, head position, blockage or airway swelling. Adjust head position, use an NPA or OPA. Epinephrine for Anaphylaxis clear a blocked airway).

**R**- Respiration (rescue breaths during CPR or for opioid overdose. Chest seals for open chest wounds, advanced procedures for tension pneumothorax).

**C**- Circulation (chest compressions during CPR, advanced procedures to deliver fluids).

**H**- Hypothermia (hypothermia can be lethal in trauma and shock patients. An inexpensive foil mylar blanket can help keep a patient warm).

Along with the medical items, your Rapid Response Kit will also include essential equipment such as PPE (personal protection equipment, nitrile gloves and any other barriers such as a CPR mask) you might carry, as well as medical shears used to cut away clothing to expose the injury or expose the chest for AED pads.

### **Category #2 - Your Essential First Aid Gear Kit**

This gear (listed below) consists of items to address non-life-threatening issues such as minor wound management, minor allergic reactions, upset stomach and such. Items such as basic bandages, dressings, OTC (over the counter) medications and possibly some prescription medications.

Side note here: When venturing into the wilderness, even for just a day hike, you should always carry 3 days' worth of your prescription medications. Many "survival" situations start out simply as "day hikes." Most rescues happen within 72 hours, so carry 3 days' worth of Rx meds with you. This is something worth always carrying, because adventurous types never know what you might do on a whim that keeps you from home for a day or two.



*Organizing your kit can be as simple as using ziplock bags.*



### Category #3 - Optional First Aid Gear

This could be “trip specific” items such as medications for altitude sickness if you are going to be a high elevation. Possibly antibiotic medications if you are out on a long backpacking trip, or even just additional first aid items you might like to carry for that particular trip. Please discuss antibiotic and prescription pain medications with your doctor. A portable Automated External Defibrillator (AED) can be a game changer when dealing with a cardiac arrest victim that has a “shockable” rhythm. Portable AED’s can be expensive; however, I tend to bring one along on family road trips and trips to more remote locations. Statistics that show survival rate, when an AED is used quickly on a cardiac arrest victim, make carrying one an easy, although expensive decision.

Once you decide on what optional First Aid gear you would like to carry, simply add these items to your “Essential First Aid” gear (kit #2).

### Category #4 - Blister Kit

While this kit will reside within category #2, (being essential First-Aid gear), blisters are such an interesting topic, I give this kit its own, well deserved, category simply for discussion purposes. This kit does, however reside within my “Essential First Aid” gear within its own pouch.



*Bulk quantities of First Aid supplies and medications can be purchased at places like Target, Walmart, or on-line.*



*Small quantities of individually wrapped OTC medications are easily found at Gas Stations.*

Having an organized First-Aid kit has the tremendous advantage of allowing you to find items quickly. Using the categories above, and even breaking those down into sub-categories will give you fast access to the supplies you need. How you organize is really up to you, however, I will provide an example based on my kits.

For hiking, backpacking and even EDC I like to have my “Rapid Response Kit” as a completely separate kit from my essential first aid gear. If there is a Life-Threatening situation, I like the ability to grab this separate kit and do what I can do to help. When traveling with a large First Aid bag, such as on road trips, the “Rapid Response Kit” resides within the large bag in its own compartment, which still allows fast access. If you also separate out items in your “Essential First Aid Items” kit, this again can help you find things more easily. For example, having medications separate from the minor wound items really helps me go right to what I am looking for.

By this point you probably see the value of organizing your kit and want to go on to the suggested items for your kit. Keep in mind, this is how I do things, your level of training might have you approaching this differently.

#### #1 - My Rapid Response Kit contents:

- Nitrile Gloves (two or more pair of non-latex



gloves)

- EMT Shears (to cut clothing when looking for bleeding or for attaching AED pads)
- CPR Mask (a barrier used when giving rescue breaths or breaths during CPR)
- Tourniquet (carry one approved by TCCC, beware of knockoff's sold on Amazon)
- Hemostatic Gauze (for wound packing severe bleeding in junctional areas of the body)
- 5x9 Pads (to stop bleeding or for wound packing)
- 4x4 or 3x3 Pads (to stop bleeding or for wound packing)
- Aspirin (in case of a heart attack, it is important to know the difference between a heart attack and cardiac arrest, and how to deal with each)
- Emergency Mylar Blanket (to cover and keep a shock victim warm)
- Chest Seals - OPTIONAL (for open chest wounds)
- NPA's / OPA's - OPTIONAL (airway management during CPR)
- Epi Pens - OPTIONAL (for severe allergic reactions)
- Narcan - OPTIONAL (for opioid overdose)

## **#2 - Essential First Aid Gear:**

- Triangle Bandage (they have many uses, medical and otherwise)



*Options for wound irrigation. A 60cc syringe, a throwaway water bottle (use the safety pin to poke a hole in the cap). A ziplock bag you can poke a hole in.*



*A large kit has compartments that help you organize your First Aid gear. Great for home, road trips and camping.*

- Q-Tips or Cotton Tipped Sterile Applicators (to remove foreign objects from the eye)
- Compressed Gauze or Roller Gauze
- ACE Type Bandage or Coban
- Medical Tape (1" Transpore tape)
- Benzalkonium Chloride (BZK) Towelettes (clean un-broken skin)
- Povidone Iodine Towelettes (antiseptic for minor cuts, scrapes and burns)
- Bacitracin Ointment (antibiotic ointment) or Medical Grade Honey
- Band-Aids (1x3 Waterproof / "H" Bandages / Steri Strips (a combination of all three)
- Adaptec Dressings (non-adhering dressing, good for minor burns)
- Tweezers (and Tic puller for outdoor activities)
- Safety Pins (mix of large and small)
- Pepto Bismal Tablets
- Benadryl (H1 Blocker) (non-severe allergic reactions)
- Pepcid AC (Famotidine) (H2 Blocker) (antacid for severe heartburn)
- Tylenol (Extra Strength)
- Tums (antacid)
- Imodium (loperamide) (for diarrhea)
- Powdered Electrolyte (dehydration / hyponatremia)
- Afrin Original (contains Oxymetazoline which narrows blood vessels and can help minor bleeding)





*A large kit has compartments that help you organize your First Aid gear. Great for home, road trips and camping.*

- 60CC Wound Irrigation Syringe (or improvise with a baggie or better, a single use water bottle)
- Tick Removal Tool (essential if this kit is for hiking/backpacking)
- Hand Sanitizer / Liquid Soap / Soap Leaves

### **#3 - Optional First Aid Gear:**

- Additional Nitrile Gloves
- Additional Personal Prescription Medications (other than the 3-day supply in your pocket)
  - Prescription Medications - (consider trip specific meds such as Diamox for altitude sickness)
  - Prescription Antibiotics - (for long backpacking trips. Consult your doctor)
  - Ibuprofen (minor aches & pains, inflammation reducer)
  - Aleve (joint stiffness)
  - Benadryl (children's chewable - gets into the system faster, just double the dose for adults)
  - Meclizine (motion sickness / nausea)
  - Glucose Gel or Tablets (diabetic issues)
  - Dental Kit (to make temporary fillings)
  - Systane Eye Drops
  - Lidocaine Wipes (pain relief for - minor burns, bites, stings, toothaches)
  - Hydrocortisone cream 1% (minor skin irritations)
  - Anti-Fungal Creme (athlete's foot, jock itch)
  - Aloe Vera Gel (1st & 2nd degree burns / frostbite)

- Glucose Tablets or Gel (low blood sugar)
- Menthol Lozenges (cough, dry or sore throat)
- Bio-Hazard Waste Bags
- Israeli Type Bandage
- Sam Splint (light weight universal splint)
- Cold Packs
- Eye Pads (sterile pads to cover the eye in case of injury)
  - Hypothermia, Rectal or Oral Thermometer (rectal thermometer-most accurate for core temps)
    - Mineral Oil (to remove insects from ears or for use as a laxative)
  - Small Flashlight
  - Alcohol Prep Pads (use to disinfect surfaces, thermometers and such, not skin)
  - Medical Grade Super Glue (wound closure)
  - Automated External Defibrillator (AED)

### **#4 - Blister Kit: (these items are kept in a separate pouch within kit #2)**

- Hypafix or Leuko Tape (to cover hot spots)
- Moleskin (cut a donut shape for protecting intact blisters)
- Blist-O Ban or 2nd Skin (for covering open blisters)
- Tincture of Benzoin (Helps bandages adhere)
- Toe Sleeves
- Engo Patches
- Safety Pin (sterilize to drain painful closed blisters)



*My minimalist kits for EDC and Day Hikes. First Aid kit on the left and Rapid Response kit on the right.*



- Small Scissors

Pre-made First-Aid kits run the gamut, from inexpensive drugstore kits that are comprised of mostly adhesive bandages (plasters for those in the UK), to high quality professional grade kits. The drugstore kits rarely contain all the items you will need when encountering an emergency. These inexpensive kits can simply be a foundation upon which to build your First-Aid kit and sometimes they actually do come with a decent case. Middle of the road are the quality kits from Adventure Medical Kits, and while being more complete than a drugstore kit, you will definitely need to add items to make this a complete kit. Professional grade kits are those from places such as Medical Gear Outfitters, North American Rescue and a small handful of similar companies. While these professional grade kits provide quality gear, you may have to add a few medications (OTC and prescription), to make the kit complete, otherwise the gear provided from these companies are top shelf, quality gear.

I have always been impressed by those that can use items from nature, such as plantain to stop bleeding. If you have knowledge of your local plants for medicinal uses, your First-Aid kit may look different than the one listed above, however, please consider carrying the things you cannot easily resource from your local plants.



## Contents of my Rapid Response Kit.

A final note: Keep up with your kit. Check for expired, damaged and worn-out items at minimum, annually, and replace as needed.

*Keith Farrar teaches outdoor skills and wilderness survival classes for “The School of Self-Reliance.” Keith has also taught BLS, CPR, First Aid, Stop-the-Bleed, California Epinephrine Auto-Injector program and the California Title 22 First Aid course.*



## Contents of my Essential First Aid Gear Kit.



*While somewhat expensive, an AED is a great addition to your first aid kits,*