

Hope for the Best, Prepare for the Worst: A Guide to the First Aid Gear and Safety Knowledge You'll Want on the Trail

Outdoor adventures of any kind leave you susceptible to injury - it's just something that comes with the territory. Unfortunately, when you're offroading, getting away from it all can also include "getting away from medical providers when you actually need their help." Here's our best tips and tricks to prevent emergencies, and keep you safe on the trail when you need it most.

First things First: Meet the 10 Essentials

The 10 essentials are widely recognized by everyone from the Boy Scouts to the National Park Service as the 10 tools you need before you head into the backcountry on an adventure of any kind. There are 5 year olds that know these are important, and now, you have no excuse!

1. **Navigation**
2. **Illumination**
3. **Sun protection**
4. **First aid kit**
5. **Knife**
6. **Fire**
7. **Shelter**
8. **Extra food**
9. **Extra water**
10. **Extra clothes**

Navigation



Looking for navigation on the trail? Check out the [Magellan TR7](#) to help you get to the trailhead, and know your way around once you get there. It'll even help you plan trips with an online community and reviews of trails all over the place.

Bad news though: you've got to have an analog backup. Throw in a map and compass for good measure.

Pro tip: You know that map and compass you keep for back up? Yeah, you should learn how to actually use it. For better or worse, there's no cell service to help you navigate some of the most beautiful trails in the backcountry, and even the best GPS can run out of battery at the worst moment.

Illumination



Make sure you've got a flashlight or headlamp, complete with extra batteries. Check out this nice one from [Outdoor Survival](#), or our personal favorite, this [Petzl Tikkina Headlamp](#). You never know when something as simple as a headlamp can save the day...err, night...when you need to change a flat in the rain, in the mud, in the dark.

Pro tip: always keep extra batteries handy!

Sun Protection



It sounds so common sense, but bear with us. Have you ever been wheeling in the snowy mountains on a beautiful sunny day? Ever finished that day with a sunburn? How about sunburned eyes? Bet you didn't see that coming. Sun damage is uncomfortable in the short-term and terrible for you in the long-term, and it's coming for you, year round.

Check out UV protective clothing, [carry sunglasses with good UV protective ratings](#), and make sure you've always got a high SPF sunscreen ready to go in your rig.

Pro-tip: replace your sunscreen annually. When it expires and becomes useless, you won't know until it's too late (and you look like a lobster).

Put together a regular old, just-like-the-one-your-grandma-had, first aid kit



Make sure it's got antiseptic wipes, antibacterial ointment, butterfly bandages or adhesive wound-closure strips, gauze pads in different sizes, sterile non-stick pads, a roll of medical tape, ibuprofen, something for bug bites or stings, an antihistamine (like Benadryl) to treat allergic reactions, splinter tweezers, and some first aid instructions.

Pro tip: let us do the work for you! [We have ready to go first aid kits, like the VSSL one pictured above.](#) You'll find some labelled by a number of people. If you're going to keep one in your rig (and you should!) make sure you've got one large enough for the maximum capacity of your truck.

Knife (or as we prefer it around here....multi-tool)



Yeah, you could just keep a standard knife handy in your rig, but why not choose a tool that can go way beyond that?

[Choose a reputable brand, such as Gerber](#), and you'll have more tools at hand than you'll know what to do with, 99% of the time. Need to clip some medical tape when you nick your finger doing something you probably shouldn't have been doing on the trail? It's got scissors! Need tweezers to stop your whining after a trailside splinter got the best of you? It's got those too!

Pro tip: When you have to use it, put it back where it goes! You might also consider buying one for every car you've got. A good multi-tool is only as useful as it is available when you need it.

Fire Supplies



In an emergency, you could need a fire for warmth or cooking. In a not-emergency, you're probably going to want one to hang out with your friends anyway! Take a [fire starter](#), some back-up matches, some lightweight fuel, and tinder, if your surroundings require it.

Pro tip: don't put additional lighter fluid on a built fire. That's a good way to wind up needing that trusty first aid kit.

Shelter



This can be as simple as some mylar sheeting - remember, it's for an emergency. If you actually need it, I promise you won't be that picky enough to care about luxury.

Pro tip: Check out this [ENO Profly Rain Tarp](#). It's super lightweight, but durable enough to get tossed around in your rig without worries.

Make Sure You've Got More Than Enough Food and Water



Generally, a good rule of thumb for a multi-day trip is two gallons of water and 2400 calories, per person, per day. That should keep you covered for any exciting activities, from riding through the whoops to working up a sweat while you dig out your buddies trucks.

It's a good idea to have a water purification setup handy as a backup. Throw some [purification tablets](#) into that first aid kit, just in case. Throw in a couple of emergency food bars, pray you don't ever have to actually ingest them, and you'll be set. When it come to outdoors survival, running out of clean water becomes a much more serious risk really quickly.

Pro tip: if you're allergic to shellfish, you're probably allergic to iodide, a very common water purification treatment - don't drink water that's been purified with it. Look into [straw filters](#), [squeeze-style filters](#) or electronic purification, and spare yourself another emergency altogether.

Extra Clothes

You are all grown ups. Take a change of clothes, especially warmer ones than you think you'll need for "just a day trip." You can take this one from here.

Long story short: know what to do when there's an emergency...before an emergency happens.

Every emergency happened to someone who once thought, "that would never happen to me." Don't put your head in the sand. Knowing what to do and how to react in an emergency can be critical. Do you know how to create a tourniquet? Help someone who suddenly can't breathe? Do some research, or watch some online trainings. There are too many resources available to claim ignorance.

For good measure, make sure you've got a first aid guide handy as part of your kit. Some are even set up with handy flashcards. Most of them have great visuals that can help you out, even in a moment of panic.

Pro tip: take a first aid class, and get CPR certified. It could literally be the difference between life and death when you're miles into the wild.