

Make A First Aid Kit

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A column from SVNA by Cyd Emmons

It's one of those things you don't think about until you need it. But when you do need it, you need it right now. It's a first aid kit, and if that's been an item you've put off for another day, it should go at the top of your to-do list.

Most of us have at least a small stash of first aid supplies and over the counter medications, but they may not be well organized. If someone's bleeding or has a burn, you want to deal with it quickly, without wasting time fumbling for appropriate materials or, worse, finding you don't have what you need. Taking the time to put together an orderly and well-stocked first aid kit is a smart thing to do.

The supplies in a first aid kit depend somewhat on your family's lifestyle. If you have active children or anyone involved in sports, you may well want to include such things as aluminum finger splints and a Save-A-Tooth kit to increase the odds that a knocked-out tooth can be successfully replanted. If your family's habits are not of the action-man variety, however, you can concentrate on items to take care of the minor cuts, burns and bruises that anyone might suffer.

Jeannine Remmey, R.N. of Salisbury Visiting Nurse Association said that the first and most important single item in any first aid kit is a first aid manual, absolutely essential, she emphasized, for anyone who doesn't have medical training. While the internet has lots of how-to first aid information, she said that a book that can be kept with your first aid supplies is quicker and always right at hand when you need it.

Most first aid manuals have a space for listing essential phone numbers, including the regional poison control center (in our area 1-800-222-1222) and those of your family doctor, pediatrician and, since a first aid kit should travel with you, a number for emergency road service. Of course, for a serious injury or illness that truly needs immediate medical attention get to the nearest emergency room or call 911.

Other essential items in a basic home or car first aid kit, Remmey said, are latex or synthetic gloves, gauze pads, adhesive tape and scissors, antibiotic ointment, antiseptic solution, adhesive bandages in assorted sizes, calamine lotion for poison ivy, ibuprofen pain relievers (don't give aspirin to children), an elastic bandage for sprains, and a flashlight with fresh batteries. Cell phones are becoming more usable in our area as new towers go up, and it's helpful to have a charger that can be plugged into the car dash.

You might also include a non-mercury thermometer, sunscreen, over the counter hydrocortisone cream for insect bites, instant ice packs, a Mylar emergency blanket for travel, and any over the counter medications that your family uses.

Organization Is Key

Once you've assembled your first aid supplies, you'll need a container to keep them organized and in one place. One good choice is a small fishing tackle box with divided compartments. You can find what you're looking for at a glance, and it's easy to grab

when you're packing for a trip. Another useful option is a backpack or book bag. These hands-free bags also are useful for taking along when you travel, but you'll need to divide your supplies among plastic containers with lids to keep everything from getting jumbled.

Jeannine Rimmey recommends small, ready-made first aid kits that are available at pharmacies and department stores as an easy and inexpensive alternative to putting together your own. The kits usually include a first aid manual and the supplies you're likely to need most often. If you decide on a ready-made kit, go through it and supplement it with additional supplies if necessary, she said.

Once your kit is complete, store it where you can get to it quickly. Keep it where small children can't reach it, but make sure that older children know what it is and where it is. Go through it periodically to make sure that medications haven't expired and to replace any supplies that have been used. Check the flashlight's batteries or get one of the new wind-up flashlights that work without batteries.