

The First Aid Kit

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One of the most important components (after water, food and shelter) of your supplies is your first aid kit. It can mean the difference between being comfortable and confident, or being distressed and fearful. The Nellie Gail Emergency Preparedness Committee strongly encourages you to put together a well thought out, quality kit that will be useful to you and your family. Although one can buy commercially made, pre-fabricated kits, some of the items in the kit may not be useful for your needs; evaluate these kits thoroughly to make sure you are comfortable with all of the items in the kit you purchase.

Many first aid kits will list the items included in the kit, but fail to explain their uses. In this month's article, we will go over in detail the use and importance of each item found in a quality kit. You should note that the quantities mentioned are the minimum quantities that make up a good kit. In addition, do not feel constrained about the items mentioned; you should customize your first aid kit for your family's particular needs.

-Ace Bandages™. 3" and 4" widths, one each. Ace bandages are good for wrapping strained joints or for holding trauma pads or stacks of gauze in place. If room permits, a 6" Ace Bandage can be used to hold chest, abdominal or back bandages in place.

-4" x 4" Sterile Gauze (non-adhesive). 20-25 pieces. Gauze helps absorb any bleeding and can be used to cover open wounds. Two to three folded in half can also make an effective eye patch.

-Non-Stick, Telfa Pad™ 2" x 2". 12-20. Telfa pads are placed next to the wound before placing gauze to minimize the bandage sticking to the wound.

-Trauma Pad 4" x 8". 1-2. A trauma pad is a very absorbent, sterile gauze that is used on large wounds to the abdomen. They are useful where there could be significant bleeding. As strange as it may sound, feminine napkins can also be used as trauma pads.

-Adhesive Band-aids. 12-20, varying sizes. These are used to cover smaller wounds. Larger Band-aids (2" x 2") will cover smaller scrapes. The new "Liquid Band-aids" can be used but only if you are certain the wound is clean and free of bacteria, dirt, etc. Otherwise, the application of Liquid Band-aids to a dirty wound will likely promote an infection.

-Butterfly Bandages. 6-10. These are used to temporarily hold together full thickness cuts and lacerations.

-Cloth Medical Tape, 2". 1 roll. This tape is used to tape splints or bandages where strength is needed. The cloth tape can also be torn lengthwise to make smaller widths.

-Paper Medical Tape, 1". 1 roll. This tape is primarily for taping gauze or bandages to the skin as it is more comfortable on the skin and preferred if you anticipate it being in contact with the skin for a long period of time.

-3" wide gauze roll/Kling. 3-4 rolls. This non-sterile roll can be used to wrap the 4" x 4" gauze onto an extremity. Wrapping with Kling or a gauze roll is preferable as it allows for some swelling of the extremity.

-Triangular bandage. 2-3. The Triangular bandage can be used to make an arm sling, a tourniquet (see caution below), or to tie a leg splint in place.

-Finger/Thumb Splint. 2-3. This is used to immobilize a fractured or dislocated finger, or to immobilize a finger that has been sutured (stitches placed.) Although aluminum is best, popsicle sticks or tongue depressors can also be used.

-S.A.M. Splints™. 1-2. The SAM splint™ is a relative new product that can be shaped to splint extremities or even be shaped to make a neck brace.

-Cardboard Splints. 1-2 of each size. Alternatively, extremity splints can be made from 8" x 12" and 8" by 16" pieces of cardboard. Make sure the corrugations run in the same direction as the long axis of the splint and make sure there are no folds in the cardboard.

-Alcohol pads. 12-20. These pre-packaged square pads can be used to clean or sterilize wounds or to sterilize needles or other medical instruments.

-Hydrogen Peroxide. 1 pint. Hydrogen Peroxide is useful for cleaning wounds without causing too much discomfort. Hydrogen Peroxide does expire and loses its effectiveness so it should be rotated in with your home supplies as needed.

-Cotton tipped applicators (sterile). 6-12. These are similar to Q-tips but sterile and are used to apply topical medications onto wounds, or they can be useful in removing foreign bodies in wounds and to the eyes and eyelids.

-Polysporin Antibiotic Ointment. 1 tube. This is a very effective topical antibiotic ointment for cuts and scrapes. Neosporin is similar but can be irritating to sensitive skin.

-Instant Hot and Cold packs. 2-3 of each. Instant hot and cold packs can be very helpful for sprains, strains, insect bites, etc. These packs are "activated" by shaking or breaking the internal bag causing a chemical reaction.

-CPR Mask. 1-2. This is a mask or shield used when performing mouth-to-mouth so as to prevent the spread of infections.

-Latex Gloves (non-sterile). 1 box of 100. Latex gloves are indispensable (and mandatory) when handling any bloody injuries, body parts, body fluids, waste, etc. Some are sensitive to the powder in the gloves and non-powdered gloves are available. Additionally, some are allergic to latex, in which case vinyl or nitrile glove may be a better choice.

-Sterile Latex Gloves. 1-2 pair. The sterile gloves may be needed for deep, penetrating wounds or for repairing wounds through sutures (stitches.)

-Safety Pins. 6-12. The safety pins have many uses including removing splinters, attaching gauze rolls, repairing torn clothing, etc.

-Bandage Scissors. 1. The best bandage scissors are known as "paramedic shears" which are easy to handle (no larger than regular scissors) but strong enough to cut denim, zippers, etc. They can even cut a penny in half.

-Thermometer. 1. Use for taking accurate temperatures. Have extra batteries if using an electronic thermometer.

-Single Edge Razor or Scalpel. 1-2. This will be used by a physician to open wounds, drain abscesses, etc.

-Rubber Bands. 6-12. Rubber bands are useful as they can be used hold gauze in place on fingers and smaller extremities, as finger tourniquets (see caution below), hold long hair out of the way, etc.

-Tourniquet. 1. When used properly and in the right situation, tourniquets are a very effective way to stop active bleeding. It should be noted that tourniquet use is appropriate when all other methods or attempts to stop active bleeding have been exhausted. Once in place, it should not be removed except by a medical professional (i.e. it is a myth that a tourniquet should be loosened every few minutes.)

Commercially made tourniquets are available but one can easily be made from clothing, belts, neck ties, triangular bandage, thick extension cord, etc. Do not use string, wire, shoelaces, or anything else that can cut into the skin. Proper use and placement of a tourniquet will be covered in a future article.

-Burn Gels. 1 bottle. Burn gels providing soothing relief, improve healing, and provide protection against infections when applied to burns.

-Pain Medications. A small bottle of Tylenol, Motrin and Aspirin are appropriate to have in your kit to help alleviate minor aches and pains. Expiration dates of these and other medications should be watched closely.

-Antacids. Antacids such as Tums, Mylanta, Zantac and Prilosec (all over-the-counter) can be helpful for acid problems exacerbated by the stress of a disaster.

-Anti-diarrheal Medications. Anti-diarrheal medications, such as Imodium (over-the-counter) can be helpful in preventing dehydration in severe cases of diarrhea. It should be avoided, however, if the diarrhea is mild or transient as diarrhea is your body's way of trying to rid itself of something.

-Laxatives. Stress can slow intestinal transit and lead to constipation. Over-the-counter laxatives (Ex-Lax, etc.) can be helpful for this condition.

-QuikClot™. 1-2 packages. QuikClot™ is a new product that helps in the clotting of blood. First used by the Israeli military, it is commercially available as a gauze to safely and effectively stop traumatic bleeding.

-Prescription Medications. 1 month. You should keep at least one month's of prescription medication, in their original bottle, in your earthquake/disaster kit. Local pharmacy records are not likely to be available and reaching your doctor will be even less likely. Strongly consider more than one month's of medication for critical (heart, blood pressure, etc.) conditions. Although prescription insurance plans will not pay for this extra month's worth of medication, you can often get samples from your physician, or you can have your physician write a one month prescription that you fill without insurance by paying for the medication yourself.

-Prescription Antibiotics. Because your health history needs to be taken in to account, consult with your physician as to what type of antibiotics you may need in a disaster/emergency setting. Most commonly, you would need antibiotics to cover for skin or soft tissue wounds and infections. During an actual disaster, and if at all possible, you should consult with neighbors who are physicians on whether or not to start the antibiotics as it is not advisable to start antibiotic treatment without first consulting a physician.

We hope that you will use this article not only to stock your first aid kit, but that you will also use it as a resource on how to properly use the items in your first aid kit.

Please feel free to email your first aid or other emergency preparedness questions to emergencypreparedness@nelliegailranch.org.

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The Nellie Gail Emergency Preparedness Committee (EPC) would like to make you aware of an important event: The Home and Community Security Fair on Saturday, November 3, 2018 at the Nellie Gail Ranch Swim and Tennis Club from 10 AM to 2 PM (hours subject to change.) Part of being properly prepared is not just anticipating natural disasters, but also securing your home. This event is being sponsored by the Nellie Gail Ranch Security Committee and we at the EPC strongly encourage you to attend this important event.