



**American
Red Cross**

10 Common First-Aid Mistakes

Picture this: You're walking through the woods behind your house and are bitten by a rattlesnake. What would you do?

John Wayne probably would have pulled out his penknife, sliced the bite wound, sucked out the venom and tied on a tourniquet. But that's the wrong approach for anyone except a silver-screen cowboy.

"The safest thing to do for snakebite is just splint the limb and go to the hospital," says Christopher P. Holstege, M.D., assistant professor of emergency medicine at the University of Virginia Health Sciences Center and director of the Blue Ridge Poison Center in Charlottesville, Va.

"Cutting the bite wound could sever tendons, nerves or arteries or increase the risk of infection, and tourniquets are risky," Dr. Holstege explains.

Dr. Holstege recommends the right approaches for the following first-aid myths:

Myth: Put butter on a burn.

Reality: If you apply butter or another substance to a serious burn, you could make it difficult for a doctor to treat the burn later and increase risk of infection.

The right approach: "It's usually OK to cool the burn with cold water, but burns with significant blistering need to be seen at a health-care facility," says Dr. Holstege. Keep the burn clean and loosely covered; don't pop the blisters.





Myth: Keep syrup of ipecac on hand in case of an accidental poisoning.

Reality: The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and other experts no longer recommend using syrup of ipecac. The AAP says there's no evidence that vomiting helps children who have swallowed something poisonous. Most emergency medical facilities have switched to activated charcoal, which binds with the poison in the stomach and prevents it from entering the bloodstream.

The right approach: Throw out any syrup of ipecac that you have at home. If an accidental poisoning occurs, immediately call your doctor or a poison-control center for advice.

Myth: Apply a tourniquet to a bleeding extremity.

Reality: When severe bleeding occurs, some people mistakenly tie a belt or shoestring around the limb above the wound to slow the flow of blood. But doing so can cause permanent tissue damage.

The right approach: Pad the wound with layers of sterile gauze or cloth, apply direct pressure, and wrap the wound securely. Seek medical help if the bleeding doesn't stop or if the wound is gaping, dirty or caused by an animal bite.



Myth: Apply heat to a sprain, strain or fracture.

Reality: Heat gives the opposite of the desired effect -- it promotes swelling and can keep the injury from healing as quickly as it could.

The right approach: Apply ice, alternating 10 minutes on, 10 minutes off for the first 24 to 48 hours.

Myth: You should move someone injured in a car accident.

Reality: A person with a spinal-cord injury won't necessarily appear badly injured, but pulling him or her out of a vehicle -- even removing the helmet from an injured motorcyclist -- could lead to paralysis or death.

The right approach: If the vehicle isn't threatened by fire or another serious hazard, it's best to leave the person in place until paramedics arrive.

Myth: Rub your eye when you get a foreign substance in it.

Reality: Doing so could cause a serious tear or abrasion.

The right approach: Rinse the eye with tap water.

Myth: Use hot water to thaw a cold extremity. Hands and feet go numb when they get too cold, in which case many people try to warm them up by putting them under hot water.

Reality: Hot water can cause further damage.

The right approach: Use lukewarm water only, or use dry heat.



Myth: Sponge on rubbing alcohol to reduce a fever.

Reality: Alcohol can get absorbed by the skin, which can cause alcohol poisoning, especially in young children.

The right approach: "Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen," says Dr. Holstege. "If a fever is very high, have it checked by a physician or treated in a hospital emergency room."



Myth: It's OK to treat at home an allergic response to a bee sting.

Reality: Delaying professional treatment could be fatal.

The right approach: For symptoms such as breathing problems, tight throat or swollen tongue, call an ambulance immediately.

For more information, contact your local American Red Cross chapter or visit www.RedCross.org today.

