

# Survival skills

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**Survival skills** are techniques that a person may use in order to sustain life in any type of environment. These techniques are meant to provide basic necessities for human life which include water, food, and shelter. The skills also support proper knowledge and interactions with animals and plants to promote the sustaining of life over a period of time. Survival skills are often basic ideas and abilities that ancients invented and used themselves for thousands of years.<sup>[1]</sup> Outdoor activities such as hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, fishing, and hunting all require basic wilderness survival skills, especially in handling emergency situations. Bushcraft and primitive living are most often self-implemented, but require many of the same skills.

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Astronauts participating in tropical survival training at Air Force Base near the Panama Canal, 1963. From left to right are an unidentified trainer, Neil Armstrong, John H. Glenn, Jr., L. Gordon Cooper, and Pete Conrad. Survival training is important for astronauts, as a launch abort or misguided reentry could potentially land them in a remote wilderness area.

## First aid

First aid (wilderness first aid in particular) can help a person survive and function with injuries and illnesses that would otherwise kill or incapacitate him/her. Common and dangerous injuries include:

- Bites from snakes, spiders and other wild animals
- Bone fractures
- Burns
- Headache

- Heart attack
- Hemorrhage
- Hypothermia (too cold) and hyperthermia (too hot)
- Infection through food, animal contact, or drinking non-potable water
- Poisoning from consumption of, or contact with, poisonous plants or poisonous fungi
- Sprains, particularly of the ankle
- Wounds, which may become infected

The survivor may need to apply the contents of a first aid kit or, if possessing the required knowledge, naturally occurring medicinal plants, immobilize injured limbs, or even transport incapacitated comrades.

## Shelter

A shelter can range from a natural shelter, such as a cave, overhanging rock outcrop, or fallen-down tree, to an intermediate form of man-made shelter such as a debris hut, tree pit shelter, or snow cave, to completely man-made structures such as a tarp, tent, or longhouse.

## Fire

Making fire is recognized in the sources as significantly increasing the ability to survive physically and mentally. Lighting a fire without a lighter or matches, e.g. by using natural flint and steel with tinder, is a frequent subject of both books on survival and in survival courses. There is an emphasis placed on practicing fire-making skills before venturing into the wilderness. Producing fire under adverse conditions has been made much easier by the introduction of tools such as the solar spark lighter and the fire piston.

One fire starting technique involves using a black powder firearm if one is available. Proper gun safety should be used with this technique to avoid harmful injury or death. The technique includes ramming tinder, like charred cloth or fine wood strands, down the barrel of the firearm until the tinder is against the powder charge. Next, fire the gun up in the air in a safe direction, run and pick up the cloth that is projected out of the barrel with the shot, and then blow it into flame. It works better if you have a supply of tinder at hand so that the cloth can be placed against it to start the fire.<sup>[2]</sup>

Fire is presented as a tool meeting many survival needs. The heat provided by a fire warms the body, dries wet clothes, disinfects water, and cooks food. Not to be overlooked is the psychological boost and the sense of safety and protection it gives. In the wild, fire can provide a sensation of home, a focal point, in addition to being an essential energy source. Fire may deter wild animals from interfering with a survivor, however wild animals may be attracted to the light and heat of a fire.



Shelter built from tarp and sticks.  
Pictured are displaced persons from the Sri Lankan Civil War

## Water



Hydration pack manufactured by CamelBak

A human being can survive an average of three to five days without the intake of water. The issues presented by the need for water dictate that unnecessary water loss by perspiration be avoided in survival situations. The need for water increases with exercise.<sup>[3]</sup>

A typical person will lose minimally two to maximally four liters of water per day under ordinary conditions, and more in hot, dry, or cold weather. Four to six liters of water or other liquids are generally required each day in the wilderness to avoid dehydration and to keep the body functioning properly.<sup>[4]</sup> The U.S. Army survival manual does not recommend drinking water only when thirsty, as this leads to underhydrating. Instead, water should be drunk at regular intervals.<sup>[5][6]</sup> Other groups recommend rationing water through "water discipline".<sup>[7]</sup>

A lack of water causes dehydration, which may result in lethargy, headaches, dizziness, confusion, and eventually death. Even mild dehydration reduces endurance and impairs

concentration, which is dangerous in a survival situation where clear thinking is essential. Dark yellow or brown urine is a diagnostic indicator of dehydration. To avoid dehydration, a high priority is typically assigned to locating a supply of drinking water and making provision to render that water as safe as possible.

Recent thinking is that boiling or commercial filters are significantly safer than use of chemicals, with the exception of chlorine dioxide.<sup>[8][9][10]</sup>

## Food

Culinary root tubers, fruit, edible mushrooms, edible nuts, edible beans, edible cereals or edible leaves, edible moss, edible cacti and algae can be searched and if needed, prepared (mostly by boiling). With the exception of leaves, these foods are relatively high in calories, providing some energy to the body. Plants are some of the easiest food sources to find in the jungle, forest or desert because they are stationary and can thus be had without exerting much effort.<sup>[11]</sup> Skills and equipment (such as bows, snares and nets) are necessary to gather animal food in the wild include animal trapping, hunting, and fishing.

Focusing on survival until rescued by presumed searchers, the Boy Scouts of America especially discourages foraging for wild foods on the grounds that the knowledge and skills needed are unlikely to be possessed by those finding themselves in a wilderness survival situation, making the risks (including use of energy) outweigh the benefits.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Navigation

Survival situations can often be resolved by finding a way to safety, or a more suitable location to wait for rescue. Types of navigation include:

- Celestial navigation, using the sun and the night sky to locate the cardinal directions and to maintain course of travel
- Using a map, compass or GPS receiver
- Dead reckoning
- Natural navigation, using the condition of surrounding natural objects (i.e. moss on a tree, snow on a hill, direction of running water, etc.)

## Mental preparedness

The mind and its processes are critical to survival. The will to live in a life-and-death situation often separates those that live and those that do not. Stories of heroic feats of survival by regular people with little or no training but a strong will to live are not uncommon. Among them is Juliane Koepcke, who was the sole survivor among the 93 passengers when her plane crashed in the jungle of Peru. Situations can be stressful to the level that even trained experts may be mentally affected. One should be mentally and physically tough during a disaster.

To the extent that stress results from testing human limits, the benefits of learning to function under stress and determining those limits may outweigh the downside of stress.<sup>[13]</sup> There are certain strategies and mental tools that can help people cope better in a survival situation, including focusing on manageable tasks, having a Plan B available and recognizing denial.<sup>[14]</sup>

In order for your survival you must have the knowledge and experience to identify a threat before it becomes a threat. In assessing your situation/threat you will put yourself ahead the population by ensuring your safety and security. In mastering your mindset you will be better able to recognize the differences of the sights, the sounds, and the baseline world.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Important survival items

Often survival practitioners will carry with them a "survival kit". This consists of various items that seem necessary or useful for potential survival situations, depending on anticipated challenges and location. Supplies in a survival kit vary greatly by anticipated needs. For wilderness survival, they often contain items like a knife, water container, fire starting apparatus, first aid equipment, food obtaining devices (snare wire, fish hooks, firearms, or other,) a light, navigational aids, and signalling or communications devices. Often these items will have multiple possible uses as space and weight are often at a premium.



You're in a dark theater, children are probably crying, and adults are probably stampeding the aisles not knowing exactly what to do. But you, if you're a situationally aware individual, already left ahead of danger. You smelled the smoke, heard the gunshots, or recognized the threat before the alarm was ever even pulled.

Survival kits may be purchased from various retailers or individual components may be bought and assembled into a kit.

## Common myths

Some survival books promote the "Universal Edibility Test".<sup>[16]</sup> Allegedly, it is possible to distinguish edible foods from toxic ones by a series of progressive exposures to skin and mouth prior to ingestion, with waiting periods and checks for symptoms.

However, many experts including Ray Mears and John Kallas<sup>[17]</sup> reject this method, stating that even a small amount of some "potential foods" can cause physical discomfort, illness, or death.

Many mainstream survival experts have perpetuated the act of drinking urine in times of dehydration.<sup>[18]</sup> However, the United States Air Force Survival Manual (AF 64-4) instructs that this technique should never be applied. Several reasons include the high salt content of urine, potential contaminants, and sometimes bacteria growth, despite urine's being generally "sterile".

Many classic cowboy movies and even classic survival books suggest that sucking the venom out of a snake bite by mouth is an appropriate treatment. However, once the venom is injected into the blood stream, it cannot be sucked out and it may be dangerous to attempt to do so. If bitten by a venomous snake, the best chance of survival is to get to a hospital for treatment as quickly as possible.<sup>[19]</sup>

## See also

- Distress signal
- Mini survival kit
- Survivalism
- Ten Essentials
- Woodcraft

## References

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Civilian pilots attending a Survival course at RAF Kinloss learn how to construct shelter from the elements, using materials available in the woodland on the north-east edge of the aerodrome.

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19. Lawson, Malcolm (2013). "Top 10 Survival Myths Busted". *SCS*. DNM International. p. 1. Archived from the original on 27 April 2015. Retrieved 18 April 2015.

## Further reading

- *Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills*; 8th Ed; Mountaineers Books; 596 pages; 1960 to 2010; ISBN 978-1594851384.

## External links

- Survival



Wikimedia Commons has media related to ***Survival skills***.

([https://www.dmoz.org/Recreation/Outdoors/Survival\\_and\\_Primitive\\_Technology/](https://www.dmoz.org/Recreation/Outdoors/Survival_and_Primitive_Technology/)) at DMOZ

## Media

- The short film *Aircrew Survival: Cold Land Survival* (<https://archive.org/details/gov.faa.survival.1>) is available for free download at the Internet Archive
- The short film *Aircrew Survival: Hot Land Survival* (<https://archive.org/details/gov.faa.survival.2>) is available for free download at the Internet Archive
- The short film *Aircrew Survival: Survival Kits, Rafts, Accessories* (<https://archive.org/details/gov.faa.survival.3>) is available for free download at the Internet Archive
- The short film *Aircrew Survival: Survival Medicine* (<https://archive.org/details/gov.faa.survival.4>) is available for free download at the Internet Archive
- The short film *Aircrew Survival: Surviving on Open Water* (<https://archive.org/details/gov.faa.survival.5>) is available for free download at the Internet Archive

- The short film *Aircrew Survival: Survival Signalling* (<https://archive.org/details/gov.faa.survival.6>) is available for free download at the Internet Archive
- The short film *Aircrew Survival: Tropical Survival* (<https://archive.org/details/gov.faa.survival.7>) is available for free download at the Internet Archive
- The short film *Aircrew Survival: The Will to Survive* (<https://archive.org/details/gov.faa.survival.8>) is available for free download at the Internet Archive

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