Worst Case Scenario Survival Guide: Snakebite

by Erin Horner

2. All snakes can bite, but not all snakes are venomous. Can non-venomous snake bites be dangerous? If so, how? If not, why not?

3. Do you think it would be safe to capture a snake in the wild and then keep it as a pet? Why or why not?

They slither along the ground, looking for food and looking for heat. You may meet one of these cold-blooded animals on a hike, or depending on where you live, right in your own backyard. They are snakes, and they know how to bite!

Like most wild animals, snakes do not like to hang out with humans. They prefer to keep their distance from us. Snakes will usually only bite a person when they feel threatened or are suddenly surprised by our presence. Would you know what to do if you or a friend were bitten by a snake? Read on to find out.
What would you do if you or a friend were bitten by a snake? Draw a picture of your answer.

Imagine that you and a friend are enjoying a hike in the hills. You are admiring the rock formations. You've spotted several plant species. Halfway to your goal of hiking to a waterfall, you decide to take a break and have a power snack. You toss your backpack down and then sit on a sun-drenched rock. Suddenly you feel an excruciating pain in your leg. You look down just in time to see a snake slither into the bushes. You've just been bitten by a venomous snake.

What do you do? First, you need to try to remain calm. That may be easier said than done, but it is important. Remaining calm and still will help to keep your heart rate at a steady level. This will help to keep the snake's venom from rushing through your bloodstream.
What could a snake bite victim do to try to remain calm? Draw a picture of your answer.

If you have a cell phone and are able to use it, call 9-1-1 or another emergency number. First responders may be able to meet you on the trail and assist you. If you don't have a phone with you or it will not work, care for the wound and then head for help.
It is important to try to clean your wound. Hopefully you packed a small first aid kit in your bag before heading out on your hike. If so, look for some alcohol or antibacterial pads to cleanse the bite area. If you do not have a first aid kit, you can use some clean water to rinse off the injury.

No matter what you've seen in a survival movie, don't cut your wound and try to suck out the venom. Doing so could cause the wound to become infected and create an even larger problem for doctors to treat.

Don't elevate your wound either. It is important to keep the injured area below the level of your heart. Just like remaining calm, this will help to reduce the spread of venom throughout your body.
You can also use an Ace bandage or other type of elasticized material to help slow down the venom. Gently wrap the bandage 2-4 inches above the bite. Wrap the bandage so that it is tight -- but not too tight. Pretend that you are wrapping up a sprained ankle. This will help to keep you from wrapping it up too tightly. The goal is to slow down the venom as it travels but still allow blood to flow to the injured limb. Wrapping it up too tight and creating a tourniquet could actually cause more damage to the hurt area.

You are finally ready to head to the hospital. Slowly begin making your way back down the trail. Don't rush, though. If you walk too fast, your heart rate will increase and that will make the venom spread more quickly.
Once you get to the hospital, doctors may be able to treat you with anti-venom. This medicine will counteract the snake's poison. Don't worry; they'll also give you some pain medication too!

Snake bites can be very scary. Even non-venomous snake bites can be painful and become infected if not treated properly. So how can you avoid being bitten? First, always leave snakes alone. You can admire them in the wild, but do so from far away!
Next, always wear long pants and boots when hiking or walking through tall grass. This will help to protect you should you accidentally sneak up on a snake.

Finally, be alert and smart when walking through nature. Don't stick your hands or feet into places where you can't see. Also, be on the lookout for snakes sunbathing on rocks or on walking trails.

Avoiding a snake bite is much easier than treating one. If you end up with a bite, remember the steps in this book and seek the help you need. Then you should be back out on the hiking trail again in no time.
Answer the following questions AFTER you have completed this book.

1. What snake survival gear would you pack in your backpack if you were heading out for a hike in the hills? Draw a picture of all that you would pack.

2. Which of the following items should you wear if you are going to be walking in an area where snakes may live? Circle your answers.

   - flip-flops
   - hiking boots
   - bathing suit
   - shorts
   - long pants
   - skirt
   - dress
   - sandals
   - hat
   - sunglasses
   - winter coat
   - turtleneck
   - sweater

3. This book suggests several things you should do if you are bitten by a snake. Rank the following suggestions from 1-5 in the order that you should do them.

   - _____ clean the wound
   - _____ remain calm
   - _____ get to the hospital
   - _____ use a bandage to slow the spread of venom
   - _____ use a cell phone and call 911

4. If I were hiking and saw a large snake on the trail, I'd ________________

   __________________________

   because _________________________

   __________________________
5. Last year your friend was bitten by a snake while playing in a field. Now he is afraid to go hiking, camping, or do anything outside. You really want to go on a big hike next week, and you want your friend to join you. Try to persuade your friend that it would be safe (and fun!) to go hiking together. Give specific reasons as to why he should join you for your outdoor adventure. How can he avoid being bitten again?

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6. You are a hero! While camping this weekend, you helped someone who had been bitten by a snake. What did you do? How did you help them? Use vivid words to describe the scenario. Write in such a way that your audience can visualize all that happened as you assisted the snake bite victim.

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