

What to do if you are bitten by a snake

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Should you be the victim of a snakebite, the best thing you can do is get to a hospital as quickly as possible, according to a new review article from the *Journal of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons* (JAAOS). Current medical treatments, including new medications and surgery, if necessary, are far more effective for snakebites than anything you can do on your own.

"Previous generations of antivenin medications were notorious for causing negative systemic reactions," says Adam W. Anz, MD, an [orthopaedic surgeon](#) at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center, Winston-Salem, NC. "But the antivenins we have available today can not only help avoid long-term damage from the [snake](#) venom, but they can also prevent the need for more invasive medical treatment."

Snakebite symptoms can range from pain, swelling, and bruising to an [irregular heartbeat](#), paralysis, and muscle twitching.

Surgery is very rarely, yet sometimes necessary to treat damage incurred from a snakebite, in cases where severe swelling compromises blood flow. This is not the only reason that orthopaedic surgeons are often consulted on these types of injuries.

"Orthopaedic surgeons are experts in regard to treating the extremities, and the hands and feet are the parts of the body most often bitten by snakes," says Dr. Anz. "This is why it is important for orthopaedic surgeons and the public to know about the effects of venom and the best ways to treat snakebites."

Tips for avoiding snakebites:

- Understand the types of environments where people are likely to encounter snakes. For example, wooded areas with deep piles of leaves or stacks of wood are frequently home to snakes.
- If you encounter a snake, get away from it. Do not attempt to pick it up or threaten its safety in any way. More than half of all bites occur when people interact inappropriately with snakes.

If you are bitten:

- Identify the type of snake if possible. If a smartphone or other camera is available, take a photo of the snake and bring it with you to the hospital.
- Get away from the snake.
- Do not attempt to suck out the venom.
- Do not apply a tourniquet unless you have a great deal of knowledge about snakes and the effects of snakebites. For some types of venom, a tourniquet can actually do more harm than good.
- Immobilize the affected body part.
- Remove all rings or restrictive jewelry on the affected limb, since snakebites often cause swelling.
- Get to a hospital or healthcare facility as quickly as you can. Do

not wait and watch for symptoms.

Relevant facts and statistics:

- Approximately 45,000 snakebite injuries are reported annually in the United States.
- Seventy to 80 percent of snakebites occur in males.
- More than half of snakebites are to the hand(s).
- Most snakebites result from intentional exposure, whether in a professional context (e.g., snake handling) or nonprofessional context (e.g., playing with snakes in the wild).
- Alcohol consumption is involved in the majority of bites, resulting from risky behavior.
- The high correlation between alcohol use and hand injury implies that bites occur when the victim is behaving in an unsafe manner, not when he or she is attempting to evade the snake.

Provided by American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

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