

Keeping hunters out of the hospital: Expert offers tips for a safe hunting season

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Errant gunshots are an obvious health risk during fall hunting season, but a range of other dangers also can send hunters to the hospital or worse: heart attacks, injured backs and broken bones are among the most common medical emergencies. Emergency medicine physician Eric Grube, D.O., of the Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse offers several tips for a safe hunting season.

"I am a hunter and always need to remind myself to lead by example when I'm in the woods," Dr. Grube says. "Hunting can be a fun sport for all to enjoy. But we need to make sure that fun isn't spoiled by some unfortunate accident."

Hunters should make sure they are properly educated about their surroundings. They also should be diligent with safety precautions, wear clothing suitable for hunting and for the weather, stay level headed, and always alert other hunters to their presence, he says.

Other tips from Dr. Grube:

- Watch for [heart attack](#) warning signs. One study of middle-aged male deer hunters found that the activities inherent to hunting—walking over [rough terrain](#), shooting an animal and dragging its carcass, for example—sent their [heart rates](#) up significantly. Although opinion varies, many doctors caution that exercising at more than 85 percent of a person's maximum heart

rate increases the risk of heart attack. Hunters unaccustomed to the strenuous hikes involved should take several breaks to rest, Dr. Grube says.

- Falls tend to be the most common cause of injuries, and often happen when a hunter is up a tree and startled by animals there. Pay attention to your surroundings at all times.
- Always check equipment and stands and use safety belts to prevent falls. Permanent tree stands are more likely to deteriorate and should be avoided. The average fall from a tree stand is about 15 feet. Injuries suffered from those heights can cause [broken bones](#), [paralysis](#), or even death.
- Avoid alcohol. Hunters are more susceptible to injuries, including [frostbite](#) and [hypothermia](#), if they've been drinking.
- Let family members know where you'll be hunting and take two-way radios or loud whistles along in case help is needed. A surprisingly large number of hunting accidents occur between family members and friends who have gone out together, but do not remember or know where their party has gone, Dr. Grube says.
- Learn some [basic first aid](#) before heading to the woods, including how to administer [cardiopulmonary resuscitation](#) or hands-only CPR, which consists of [chest compressions](#), should a [hunting](#) partner have a heart attack.

Dr. Grube notes four basic rules of firearm safety from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources known as TAB-K: Treat every firearm as if it is loaded, always point the muzzle in a safe direction, be certain of your target and what's beyond it, and keep your finger outside the trigger guard until ready to shoot.

For example, if a hunter stumbles with a firearm in one hand and nothing in the other, whatever that person does with the free hand will automatically happen with the hand holding the gun, the agency notes.

So if a finger is inside the trigger guard, that hand will likely close around the pistol grip of the gun and on the trigger causing an unwanted discharge.

More information: For B-roll of a hunter and news network membership, visit the [Mayo Clinic News Network](#).

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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