

# A wilderness expert's keys to safety in the great outdoors

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(HealthDay)—Some simple steps can reduce danger when you venture

into the great outdoors, an expert says.

"Knowing your limits, not trying to do too much, knowing where you're going and what you might encounter there and being aware of the environment you're in are the best ways to avoid problems outdoors," said Dr. Henderson McGinnis, an expert in wilderness medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C.

"Doing a little preparation before you go and being sensible while you're out there can make all the difference," he added in a news release.

McGinnis is an associate professor of emergency medicine at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center, where he is also medical director of the AirCare emergency transport service.

Here are his top wilderness safety tips:

- **Don't count on your cell phone.** "You might not have cell service out in the woods, even in places close to populated areas," he warned.
- **Avoid drinking out of streams and rivers.** The water may look clean, but it could contain animal waste or other pollutants. "Have your own source of water or a way to purify water," he said.
- **Proper attire and gear are a must.** "You should at a minimum wear some sort of supportive shoe, whether it's a trail running shoe or a hiking boot. You definitely don't want to be wearing flip-flops or something that provides no traction or support," McGinnis said. Choose comfortable clothes that will protect you from sun, rain and insects.

How much you carry depends on what you're doing and where you're going. Always carry water and a snack, even on short outings. But if

you're going out for a half-day or less, you can apply sunscreen and insect repellent at home and leave the containers behind, McGinnis said.

"If I'm going out for more than a couple of hours I'll take a small backpack or waist pack and maybe a soft shell jacket or another layer of clothing, and definitely a hat and sunglasses this time of year," he said. "Plus enough food and [water](#) for however long I'm going to be out."

When it comes to first aid equipment, McGinnis often carries a "boo-boo bag." It's a quart-size plastic storage bag with bandages, some tape, a tube of antibiotic ointment and a couple of steri-strips to close small wounds.

"On a longer trip I'll throw in tweezers or a multi-tool, baby wipes, a little bar of hotel soap, hand sanitizer gel and a SAM splint, which is a thin piece of aluminum with foam coating that you can do a million things with," McGinnis said.

Overall, the key is "having a little foresight to plan for what you might encounter," he said.

**More information:** SOURCE: Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center, news release, July 2018

The Center for Wilderness Safety offers [outdoor safety tips](#).

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