

CAMPING SAFETY ESSENTIALS

BE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING

Look, I'm not here to scare you. Camping can be one of the safest, most rewarding things you can do. But being prepared means you can relax and enjoy yourself instead of worrying about what might go wrong.

This guide isn't about paranoia. It's about confidence. When you know what to do if the weather changes, if you see wildlife, or if someone gets hurt, you can handle it without panic.

Let's make sure you're ready for anything.

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BEFORE YOU GO: THE SAFETY BASICS

The best way to stay safe is to prepare before you leave home. Here's what you need to do:

Check the Weather (and Keep Checking)

Start checking the forecast 7–10 days before your trip. Look for:

- Temperature range (highs and lows)
- Chance of rain or storms
- Wind speed

Check again the morning you leave. The weather changes fast, especially in the mountains or near water.

If severe weather is predicted (thunderstorms, high winds, extreme heat or cold), consider rescheduling. There's no shame in picking a better weekend.

Share Your Trip Plan

Tell someone at home:

- Where you're going (campground name and location)
- When you're leaving and when you'll be back
- Who's with you
- Your phone number and emergency contact info

This is simple, but it could save your life. If something goes wrong and you don't check in, someone will know where to look.

Download Offline Maps

Cell service is spotty in most campgrounds. Download offline maps before you leave using:

- AllTrails (hiking trails)
- Gaia GPS (backcountry navigation)
- Google Maps (screenshot or download the area)

Know where the nearest hospital, urgent care, or ranger station is. Save that info in your phone.

Pack a Basic First Aid Kit

You don't need a massive kit. Just the essentials:

- Adhesive bandages (assorted sizes)
- Antiseptic wipes
- Antibiotic ointment (Neosporin)
- Pain relievers (ibuprofen or acetaminophen)
- Antihistamine (Benadryl for allergic reactions)
- Gauze pads and medical tape
- Tweezers (for splinters or ticks)
- CPR mask
- Disposable gloves
- Duct tape (fixes everything)

Keep it in a waterproof bag and know where it is at all times.

WEATHER: WHAT TO DO WHEN THINGS CHANGE

The weather is unpredictable. Here's how to handle the most common scenarios:

Rain

Before it starts:

- Set up camp as soon as you arrive. Don't wait until the rain hits.
- Avoid low spots, valleys, or areas near streams (they can flood).
- Pack a tarp or two. String one over your picnic table or tent entrance for extra coverage.

If you're caught in the rain:

- Get inside your tent or car.
- Keep your sleeping bag and clothes dry. Use trash bags or dry sacks.
- Don't cook inside your tent (carbon monoxide risk).

After the rain:

- Wipe down your tent before packing it up.
- Let the gear air dry at home to prevent mildew.

Wind

Set up for wind:

- Stake your tent tight. Use all the stakes and guy lines.
- Point the narrow end of your tent into the wind (less surface area).
- Store loose gear inside your tent or car (chairs, tarps, trash bags).

If wind picks up:

- Add extra stakes or weigh down your tent with rocks.

- Move gear away from tall trees (branches can fall).

Lightning

Lightning is serious. If you hear thunder, the storm is close enough to hit you.

What to do:

- Get inside your car or a hard-sided shelter immediately.
- Avoid tall trees, metal objects, and open fields.
- Stay away from water.
- Wait 30 minutes after the last thunder before going back outside.

Never: Stand under a lone tree or near metal poles. Lightning takes the path of least resistance, and that could be you.

Cold Temperatures

Stay warm:

- Layer your clothing (base layer, insulating layer, waterproof outer layer).
- Check your sleeping bag rating. If it's rated for 30°F, pack extra blankets or layers if temps drop lower.
- Eat hot meals and drink warm liquids. Your body burns calories to stay warm.

Watch for hypothermia signs:

- Shivering
- Confusion or sluggish thinking
- Slurred speech

If someone shows these signs, get them warm immediately (dry clothes, sleeping bag, warm drinks). Seek help if symptoms don't improve.

Hot Temperatures

Stay cool:

- Drink water constantly. If you're thirsty, you're already dehydrated.
- Plan activities for early morning or evening. Rest in the shade during the hottest part of the day.
- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothes and a hat.

Watch for heat exhaustion:

- Heavy sweating
- Dizziness or nausea
- Headache

Move to shade, drink water, and rest. If symptoms worsen (confusion, vomiting, fainting), seek medical help.

WILDLIFE SAFETY (BEARS, CRITTERS, BUGS)

Most wildlife wants nothing to do with you. But food attracts animals, so proper storage is key.

Food Storage

At camp:

- Use bear boxes if the campground has them.
- If not, hang food in a bear bag at least 200 feet from your tent and 10–12 feet off the ground.
- Store food in your car if bears aren't active in the area (check with the campground).

Never:

- Keep food, trash, or toiletries in your tent.
- Leave food unattended on the picnic table.

If You See a Bear

Stay calm. Do NOT run.

Here's what to do:

- **Stop.** Stand still and assess the situation.
- **Make yourself big.** Raise your arms. Stand on a log if you can.
- **Speak calmly.** Say "Hey bear" in a steady voice.
- **Back away slowly.** Don't turn your back. Give the bear space.

If the bear approaches:

- Stand your ground.

- Use bear spray if you have it (aim for the face when the bear is 20–30 feet away).
- If the bear makes contact, play dead (lie face down, hands over your neck). Most attacks stop once the bear feels you're not a threat.

Black bear vs. grizzly:

- Black bears: If attacked, fight back. Make noise, throw rocks, use a stick.
- Grizzly bears: Play dead.

(Most campgrounds in the lower 48 only have black bears. Grizzlies are in Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, and Alaska.)

Raccoons, Rodents, and Bugs

- Store food in sealed containers or coolers.
 - Hang trash bags or put them in your car at night.
 - Use bug spray (DEET or picaridin) for mosquitoes and ticks.
 - Check for ticks after hiking. Remove them with tweezers (pull straight out).
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EMERGENCIES & FIRST AID

Most camping injuries are minor. Here's how to handle the common ones:

Blisters

- Cover with moleskin or duct tape before they get worse.
- Don't pop them unless they're huge and painful.

Cuts and Scrapes

- Clean with water and antiseptic wipes.
- Apply antibiotic ointment.
- Cover with a bandage.

Burns

- Cool with water (not ice) for 10–15 minutes.
- Cover with a clean, dry cloth.
- Take ibuprofen for pain.

Bug Bites and Stings

- Wash the area.
- Apply antihistamine cream or take Benadryl.
- Watch for allergic reactions (swelling, difficulty breathing). If severe, seek help immediately.

Sprains

- Rest, ice (if you have it), compress with an elastic wrap, and elevate.
- Use trekking poles or a stick for support if you need to walk.

When to Get Help

Call 911 or head to the nearest hospital if:

- Someone has difficulty breathing or chest pain
 - There's severe bleeding that won't stop
 - A bone is broken or a joint is dislocated
 - Someone is confused, disoriented, or unresponsive
 - There's a severe allergic reaction
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WHEN TO CHANGE PLANS (OR HEAD HOME)

Sometimes the best decision is to leave early. Here's when:

Red Flags to Bail

- Severe thunderstorms or tornado warnings
- Winds over 50–60 mph
- Flash flood warnings
- Extreme heat (100°F+) with no shade or water
- Someone in your group is injured or seriously ill

Trust Your Gut

If something feels wrong, don't ignore it. No camping trip is worth risking your safety or someone else's.

Have a Backup Plan

Know where the nearest hospital, urgent care, or ranger station is before you arrive. Save the address and phone number in your phone.

QUICK SAFETY CHECKLIST

Before you leave home:

- Weather checked
- Trip plan shared with someone at home
- First aid kit packed
- Offline maps downloaded
- Emergency contacts saved in phone

At camp:

- Know where the nearest help is (ranger station, hospital)
- Food stored properly (away from the tent)
- Campfire safety checked (or fire restrictions reviewed)
- Gear secured for wind

Safety doesn't mean you can't have fun. It just means you're prepared when things don't go perfectly. And trust me, they never do. That's part of the adventure.

The more trips you take, the more confident you'll feel. You'll learn what works, what doesn't, and what to pack next time.

Now get out there. You've got this.