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## Guy Gear

# First-aid kit buying guide

By Mark Anders

From the September 2008 *Boys' Life* magazine

You're on an outing with your troop when a buddy slips off the trail and messes up his leg. Miles and at least a day's hike from the nearest trailhead, what are you gonna do?

Hopefully, you have the first-aid training and supplies needed to care for your friend. If not, earn your First Aid merit badge ASAP — and read on. We hooked up with Dr. Eric Weiss, an Eagle Scout and one of the premier authorities on wilderness medicine, to teach you all you need to know about first-aid kits.



## THE LOW DOWN

**Build it or buy it?** “The biggest advantage to building your own kit is knowing exactly what you have in your kit and where it is inside,” Dr. Weiss says. The hard part is buying everything you need in small enough sizes to keep your first-aid kit light and compact.

But buying a prepackaged kit costs less, requires no set up time and usually comes in a specially designed storage bag with handy pockets and compartments.

“If you buy a commercially made kit, just make sure you take everything out of it and then put it back in so you're familiar with all of the components,” he says. “Understand what each item is used for so you'll be prepared.”

**Price:** You'll save money by buying a kit. “As little as \$10 to \$25 should take care of it,” Dr. Weiss says. Look for one that's well organized. “This eliminates the hunt-and-search,” he explains. “In an emergency, you want anyone to be able to open the kit and quickly find what they need.”

**Customizing a kit:** “The type of medical kit and supplies you bring will be dependent on your group size, trip duration and remoteness,” Dr. Weiss says. “For remote locations you'll need to rely on your group's resources, and your medical kit should be stocked with supplies to treat a much wider range of injuries or illnesses than for a day hike in the woods.”

Make a list of the types of activities you do most often and the sort of places you most often go and how long you'll be gone, then build or buy a kit to fit.



**What every kit should include:** “Don't forget to pack a first-aid manual,” he says. Nothing takes the place of first-aid training, but it's important to have a good manual that you can turn to in an emergency.

Beyond that, you'll want to include supplies to treat the most common outdoor injuries — stuff like moleskin for blisters, tweezers for splinters, bandages, antibiotic ointment and antiseptic towelettes for cuts and scrapes, ibuprofen for aches and pain, and antihistamines for allergic reactions.

**What you should leave out:** Skip the instant ice packs, Dr. Weiss says. “They're heavy and only provide about 15 minutes of cold therapy. To properly treat a sprained ankle, you need to ice the injured area every 30 minutes. Use ice from a cooler, snow or cold water from a river or lake if you need to improvise.”

And forget the hydrogen peroxide—it's so strong it kills the germs and living tissue, so it'll just take longer for your wound to heal. “The only solution you need to clean wounds is clean drinking water or a dilute povidone-iodine solution if the wound is particularly dirty,” he says.

**Keep your kit current:** “Make a contents list so you can keep an inventory of items in your kit,” he says. “And as my mom always said: Put your name and phone number on it.” Get into the habit of checking your kit before every outing. If any medicines and ointments have expired or have been

used up, replace them. And make sure nothing is wet or spoiled.

### BUILD IT YOURSELF

As it says in the “First Aid” merit badge pamphlet, “The worst first-aid kit is the one that never gets made.” Make sure that doesn’t happen by buying a good kit like those shown here or building one yourself.

**At Home:** Gather these materials and keep them in a handy spot in the house:

- First-aid manual, like the “First Aid” merit badge pamphlet
- 2 2-inch gauze bandages
- Roll of 1-inch adhesive tape
- 12 3-by-3-inch sterile pads
- 12 assorted adhesive bandages
- 2 elastic bandages, 3 to 6 inches wide
- Thermometer
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Box antiseptic wipes with benzalkonium chloride
- 2 pairs latex gloves
- Safety pins
- Calamine lotion
- Eye goggles
- Mouth-barrier device
- Small bottle antihistamines (Benadryl)
- Small bottle acetaminophen for pain and fever
- Small bottle ibuprofen for inflammation, muscle aches, pain and fever



**For the Trail:** This kit should cover one patrol on a typical outing:

- First-aid manual, like the “First Aid” merit badge pamphlet
- 1 2-inch roller bandage
- 2 1-inch roller bandages
- 2 rolls of 1-inch adhesive tape
- 6 alcohol swabs
- Water purification tablets
- 12 assorted adhesive bandages
- 2 elastic bandages, 3 to 6 inches wide
- 12 3-by-3-inch sterile pads
- Antiseptic towelettes
- 2 triangular bandages, 40-inch
- 2 3-by-4-inch nonadherent sterile dressings
- 5-by-9-inch trauma pad to stanch bleeding
- Moleskin
- 3 butterfly closure bandages
- Petroleum jelly
- Antibiotic ointment
- Insect repellent
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Safety pins
- Aloe vera gel for sunburn
- 2 pairs latex gloves
- Mouth-barrier device

### INDIVIDUAL FIRST-AID KITS

One of these should be in every pack:

**REI Hiker First Aid Kit** (\$28) This fold-out kit has 11 organizer pockets packed with all the basics for day hikes. Weight: 12.5 oz. ([www.boyslife.org/links/rei](http://www.boyslife.org/links/rei) or 1-800-426-4840)



**Adventure Medical Kits Light and Fast Trail** (\$26) A lightweight kit with simple-to-follow E-Z Care instructions that organizes supplies based on the type of injury. Weight: 12 oz. ([www.boyslife.org/links/amkits](http://www.boyslife.org/links/amkits) or 1-800-324-3517)

**Scout Camper First Aid Kit** (\$19) This is the smallest and most affordable kit here with a pared-down collection of first-aid basics packed inside a plastic case. Weight: 3 oz. ([www.boyslife.org/links/scoutstuff](http://www.boyslife.org/links/scoutstuff) or 1-800-323-0736)

### FOR THE PATROL (for 5 to 9 Scouts)

One of these can be shared by a patrol:



**REI Backpacker First Aid Kit** (\$42) A great value for the price, this kit includes a wide-range of first-aid supplies (plenty for your patrol) and is ideal for a multi-day backcountry outing. Weight: 1 lb. 9 oz. ([www.boyslife.org/links/rei](http://www.boyslife.org/links/rei) or 1-800-426-4840)

**Atwater Carey Expedition Kit** (\$55) Designed for backcountry trips of up to 10 days, the Expedition Kit includes all of the necessary basics for your patrol's first-aid needs. Weight: 15 oz. ([www.boyslife.org/links/atwatercarey](http://www.boyslife.org/links/atwatercarey) or 1-800-558-6614)

**Adventure Medical Kits Weekender** (\$60) The name of this kit is a little misleading because this well-stocked rig can handle groups of six for backcountry outings lasting up to a week. Also includes simple-to-follow E-Z Care first-aid instructions. Weight: 1 lb. 7 oz. ([www.boyslife.org/links/scoutstuff](http://www.boyslife.org/links/scoutstuff) or 1-800-323-0736)

### KITS FOR AN ENTIRE TROOP

Give one or two of these to your Scoutmaster to haul:

**Adventure Medical Kits Comprehensive** (\$190) The most complete kit here, the Comprehensive is designed for groups of up to 14 on multi-week expeditions and even comes with a smaller, detachable ultralight and waterproof kit for summit attempts. Weight: 3 lbs. 4 oz. ([www.boyslife.org/links/amkits](http://www.boyslife.org/links/amkits) or 1-800-324-3517)

**Atwater Carey Pro Series 3.0** (\$100) A less-expensive and lighter-weight option — though also slightly less comprehensive — this kit is well suited for multi-week care for groups of up to eight Scouts. Weight: 2 lbs. 1 oz. ([www.boyslife.org/links/atwatercarey](http://www.boyslife.org/links/atwatercarey) or 1-800-558-6614)



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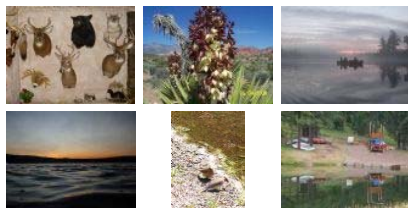
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