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Subject: **Getting Ready for Summer Outdoors**

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Instructional Support  
Technical Note

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Outdoor trips are made more enjoyable by preparing for the various challenges that the wilderness can hold in store. Although it can take years to be truly prepared for all situations in the wilderness, this article will cover some of the basics of getting ready for the outdoor environment in summer.

## Sun

Brilliant sunshine is one of the most enjoyable parts of summer, but sunlight contains a hidden danger. Sunshine is composed of different types of radiation including ultra-violet or "UV". Some of this UV radiation can damage your skin in the form of sunburn. The surface of your eyes can also be damaged (snowblindness). One way to protect your skin is to use an appropriate sun screen. Good sunglasses can prevent damage to your eyes if they are designed to filter out UV radiation.

It is important to know that different surfaces reflect different amounts of UV radiation. Grass reflects almost no UV. Dry sand reflects 17% of the UV radiation while snow can reflect 85%. In the summer water reflects 10% in the morning and late afternoon and can reflect up to 100% at noon.

If you are traveling in a very hot environment there are several ways to help you stay cool. Wear a long sleeved shirt and pants of thin, loose fitting, light colored (preferably white) cotton. A wide brimmed cap with ventilation can protect your face and neck. When you are in the shade, remove as much clothing as practical. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids.

When you want to reduce your exposure to the sun, remember that the sun's rays are strongest between

9:00 AM and 3:00 PM. This is a good time to seek the shade, reduce exertion and replenish your fluids.

## Rain and Wind

Summer is not all sunshine. Rain and wind often arrive to dampen your spirits and cool things off. Heat can be lost 200 times faster than normal when your body and clothing are wet, so it is important to have adequate waterproof clothing on outdoor trips. Any rain gear you buy should have waterproof seams. Seams can either be factory sealed or sealed with a special compound after purchase. Boots should also be waterproofed before departing for the outdoors.

If you travel often in the outdoors, you may choose to investigate clothing made of Gore-Tex™ or Thin-Tech™. These waterproof / breathable fabrics, and others like them, keep water out while also allowing sweat to evaporate.

Wind can also affect how rapidly your body loses heat. The stronger the wind, the more rapidly your body will cool off. A light nylon wind breaker over your other clothing can keep you warmer during windy days. Some of the waterproof / breathable clothing mentioned above can double as windproof protection.

If you are traveling in the high country or mountains during the summer, it is possible to encounter snow and cold weather, as well as rain. In these conditions it is best to wear layers of clothing as well as a warm hat, boots and gloves or mitts. Wool and synthetic (e.g. polyester pile) fabrics tend to be better than cotton in cold weather. Cotton loses it's ability to

insulate well once it becomes damp or wet. Avoid contact with cold objects and don't drink cold liquids. Keeping active helps to keep you warm, but be sure you know when to quit and seek shelter. Staying dry and eating are also important when trying to maintain body warmth.

## Terrain

If you are going to be traveling in dense bush or vegetation, your clothing should be designed to protect you. Thicker fabrics which can resist tearing and protect from thorny spines are a better choice in this type of terrain. Leather gloves to protect your hands are essential equipment when in dense bush. Glasses or sunglasses should be worn to protect your eyes from twigs or branches.

Good sturdy boots with adequate ankle support can protect your feet and ankles when traveling in tangled bush or deadfall. When on rugged trails or rough terrain, it is also important to have good footwear. Remember to wear your boots frequently prior to taking them on a long trip to be sure your boots are broken in. Wearing two pairs of socks (one thick and one thin) can help to reduce the formation of blisters as long as your boots are big enough to accommodate them. If you feel a blister or hot spot starting to develop, stop as soon as you can to apply moleskin or tape. It is far better to prevent blisters than live with them.

## Wildlife

One of the great joys of being in the outdoors is seeing animals in their native surroundings. On occasion, this can lead to unpleasant encounters. In general, animals rarely attack people without provocation. Exceptions would be animals which are infected with rabies or when animals are protecting their young.

Often, an animal will warn of its intentions by trying to repel or ward off an intruder. This should be a signal to slowly and carefully back away, avoiding any sudden movements. Avoid situations in which an animal is cornered or has no means of escape. In these situations, even timid creatures may bite, scratch or lash out. It is also wise to avoid any

animal which behaves in an unusual way. Unusual behavior includes animals which approach people when their normal behavior would be to shy away.

When in snake country, encounters can best be avoided by staying away from their normal habitats. Snakes often seek protection in swamps, rocky ledges, wood, stone, and rubbish piles, caves and deserted buildings, especially in rural areas. Don't put your hands or feet into places where you cannot look. Protective clothing should include high top boots and gloves, as most bites are to arms and legs. When in snake infested areas, avoid hiking alone or at night. Above all, do not handle or approach snakes unless you want a nasty surprise.

Insects can also cause problems during the summer. The most important venomous insects are the bees, wasps and ants. Sweet foods, fruits, syrups, flowers and some perfumes attract these insects. If you are known to be sensitive to insect stings, you should consult your family physician about medications you should consider carrying when taking extended trips in the outdoors.

Your major protection in areas where insects are a problem should include protective clothing and repellents. Your clothing should cover any exposed skin. The cuffs of your shirt and pants should not allow insects to enter. Many insects find it difficult to cling to Rip-stop nylon used for many articles of backpacking clothing, such as wind breakers. Head nets can be worn in particularly bad areas.

Many repellents are on the market and it should be noted that any given repellent may not work well on all insects. Check the label to be sure your repellent works against the insects you expect to encounter. Special garments are available in which the fabric is treated with a repellent. The effectiveness of these garments is apparently long lasting.

Despite the fact that many environmental factors exist which may reduce our enjoyment of the outdoors, a little preparation can go a long way. Take the time to outfit yourself properly and enjoy the wilderness SAFELY.

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This article originally appeared in Family Health Magazine and is reprinted courtesy of Cyril Shokoples. Cyril is an internationally certified Mountain Guide and Emergency Medical Technician Instructor. He currently resides in Edmonton and is the proprietor of the firm Rescue Dynamics, which is involved in climbing, rescue and safety instruction, as well as mountain guiding. Further information on courses as well as additional copies of this and other technical notes in this series can be obtained directly from Rescue Dynamics.

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