

Snakebite, and Dislocated Fingers and Toes!

This Snakebite advice is for people who cannot immediately get to a medical facility for treatment. The best way to treat a snake bite is to put ice on the bite, keep the affected limb lower than the heart, keep the patient calm (or as calm as can be), and get to a medical facility if at all possible.

All snake bites are serious, but though all snakes will bite, few snakes are venomous. Adult venomous snakes can choose to inject venom or not. This depends whether they are hunting or defending themselves or their den, on the time of day or time of year, ambient temperature, and many other factors. Still, more people die each year from being struck by lightning than die from venomous snakebites.

When I was a kid, decades ago, I was told to treat a rattlesnake bite by cutting an X across each hole, then sucking the venom out. That was wrong! The person sucking the venom out can only get a small amount of venom. The venom can affect him if he has a cut or canker sore in his mouth. The X-shaped cuts heal poorly and cause permanent scars. Don't do it!

Articles cite anecdotal stories that shocking the site of the snakebite with a stun gun will help. Researchers say stun gun therapy doesn't work. Best advice? Buyer beware! If nothing else, it's hard to be calm after stun gun therapy! Don't believe me? Try it.

Oh, last thing. If it is possible to bring the dead snake that bit you to the medical facility, the species of snake can be identified. Some snakes that are not venomous look very much like venomous snakes.

And for fun - did you know that there are NO poisonous snakes? Yep, it's true! You can eat all snakes. Yum! Looks like snakes have more to fear from you than you have to fear from them!

This Dislocated Toes or Fingers advice is ONLY for closed dislocations - dislocations with no open wound at the dislocation. If there is an open wound at the dislocation, or if the bone is showing, you need to see a doctor. Unless you're the Rambo type, you may need a little help on this one. Don't try to grab the finger or toe and pull suddenly or try to pop it back in place. That only works in movies! Hold on to the affected digit and pull slowly until you can Hear, Feel, or See the digit regain its normal shape. After you have the digit reasonably straight, tape it to the finger or toe next to it, to splint it. Is reasonably straight good enough? This is first aid, guys! See a doctor.

This information is courtesy of Eric Johnson, an EMT who worked with people in Renaissance Faires, who had poor access to health care. Thanks, Eric!

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