

+



Every cut should be treated, no matter how minor, lest you have an infection later. (Photo by Mark Rackay)

When minor cuts and scrapes become serious

When minor cuts and scrapes become serious

As a young outdoor kid, my only means of transportation to and from the woods was a bicycle. A sadistic contraption built by a madman who must have hated kids.

One particular sunny afternoon, I was heading home after a neighborhood ball game.

The trip home involved a long and steep downhill section on a road full of washboards and loose gravel.

As I was gaining considerable speed, the bike seized the opportunity to eat my pant leg, and thusly, send me flying high heels over tin cups across the handlebars. It seemed like a good time to start remembering the words to the Hail Mary.

For a moment while in flight, I recalled something from science class about Newton's Law: An object in motion has a tendency to stay in motion unless acted upon by an outside force.

It was pretty clear that I was the object in motion as I skidded face down on the gravel with an ever-increasing velocity.

It was at this moment that I realized the "outside force" was the bicycle still attached to my pant leg and rapidly gaining on my skidding carcass. The bike made one final assault as it ran over the top of my body, tearing free of



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

the pants and continuing down the hill without me.

During my childhood, I normally looked like an advertisement for Band-Aids and Mercurochrome. When I walked into the house for some first aid, my grandmother said a few words I did not think she even knew. Off to the bathroom for repairs we headed.

I mention this story only to demonstrate my considerable experience with personal injuries in the great outdoors.

Most of the superficial injuries to myself, I wrapped in duct tape or dammed the flow of blood with a piece of my dirty T-shirt and went about my business. But it is the minor cuts and scrapes that will come back and get you.

Several years ago, I was on a fishing trip in Canada walking along the shore of a remote lake. I did a one-legger down a beaver hole on the bank

and embedded a stick into the soft part of my lower leg to the side of the shinbone.

The wound left a fair-sized hole and an amount of bruising around the site, but nothing appeared broken. I mopped up the blood with a paper towel and went back to fishing.

Over the next few days the leg hurt, but I assumed it was from the bruising and pressed on.

By the time I got home, I had a full-blown infection and off to the doctor my wife carried me. I left with a fantail full of antibiotics and instructions for soakings to draw out the infection.

It was several more weeks before that mess finally cleared up.

The interesting side note to this is that if I had cleaned out the wound when it happened, none of the later infections and doctor visits would have been necessary.

I was hunting in a South American jungle for the elusive water buffalo. A dangerous creature that demands your constant attention lest you get your landscape rearranged. The area we hunted was covered in thorn trees and bushes that punctured your profile throughout the day.

Again I suffered a nasty infection from all those thorn wounds.

One thorn was so deeply embedded in my body; it did not resurface for some six months after I was home. If that thorn would have headed into my bloodstream and found its way to my heart, someone else would be writing this article.

Once again, if I had cleaned out those punctures every evening, none of the aftermath would have ensued.

If you spend time outdoors, you are going to get your share of minor cuts and scrapes. Hopefully, you never have to suffer a serious injury and you don't want the minor ones to become serious.

Take a moment to care for the minor cuts before continuing about your day.

First step is to stop the bleeding using direct pressure or a pressure dressing (we are assuming that it is not a serious wound that requires a tourniquet). Once bleeding is controlled, clean the wound. Scrub and irrigate the wound with disinfected water — not water from a stream or pond — and lots of soap.

In addition, or at the very least, wipe out the wound and surrounding area with some sort of wound wipe with a disinfectant. I carry a couple of the iodine wipes in my pocket kit now days, be-

cause I learned my lesson.

Follow it up with a dab of Neosporin (or similar wound care) and a dressing. I usually use the waterproof Band-Aids because they seem to stick better. A couple minutes is a minor interruption in your day to head off what might become several weeks dealing with an infection.

At the end of your day address the cut again. Rewash with soap and clean water, and reapply the Neosporin and a clean bandage. This is a good time to monitor for an infection. If you see redness, swelling, pus, heat, or pain at the injury site, be aware an infection may be starting.

When you see red streaks radiating from the wound or have fever or chills and swollen lymph nodes, you better seek medical help. A serious infection has got a hold on you.

If you suspect an infection, you can begin treatment as follows:

Soak the injured area in hot water for 20 to 30 minutes three to four times a day;

Try to keep the wound open by pulling the edges apart;

Clean, irrigate and dress the wound after each soaking;

Monitor for additional

symptoms. Draw a circle around the perimeter of the redness or swelling. If you see the redness extend past the circle, the infection is spreading. If the redness retreats, the infection may be getting better.

Do not hesitate to leave and seek professional medical attention if you are unsure how to treat the infection or if the symptoms worsen.

It is not that big of a deal to take care of the minor cuts and scrapes when they happen.

A couple minutes at sundown to touch up the wounds once more is sure much better than having to deal with an infection later. I have to take care of those minor injuries myself since my grandmother is no longer around to bandage me and send me back into the outdoors.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@icloud.com