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## Camping and Woods Safety

You're very excited - your mom and dad promised to take you on a fun camping trip this year. Or maybe your scout group is gearing up for an awesome canoe trip. Enjoying the beauty and nature of the woods is fun - if you are careful. Here are some tips to keep you safe.

### Packing Basics

Before you leave, pack these few important things that will make your trip more comfortable and safe:

- map of the area
- compass (learn how to use it beforehand)
- cell phone (though you can't be sure it will work in remote areas)
- whistle
- bottled water and food
- sleeping bag
- flashlight with extra batteries
- sunscreen and sunglasses
- waterproof matches
- first-aid kit with gauze pads, adhesive bandages, tape, tweezers, and antiseptic
- waterproof tent (set it up beforehand to practice)

### Into the Woods

Staying safe in the woods means using common sense. That means being aware of your surroundings and always camping with an adult. Never go into the woods by yourself. Some things you need to be careful of while you're camping are insects, poison ivy, extreme hot or cold temperatures, and rain or snow.

### Bugs

If insects bug you, ask an adult to set up camp away from the water and build a small fire. The water attracts bugs, and the smoke from the fire will keep most of the bugs away. Another thing you can do is to remember to keep the tent door zipped at all times, even if you're just going in for a minute. Also, turn off your flashlight before you enter your tent because insects such as moths are attracted to the light and will follow you.

Always check for ticks at the end of the day when you've been in the woods. Ticks can carry disease and germs. Some ticks are tiny, like the size of the head of a pin! You'll want an adult to help you inspect your body for ticks. Check behind your knees and ears, under your arms, and in your groin - that's where your legs meet your abdomen, or belly area. If you're camping with a pet, have an adult check your pet for ticks, too - dogs and cats can pick up ticks in their fur even more easily than humans. If you do find a tick, it needs to be removed. Get an adult to help you.

### Poison Ivy

Poison ivy is a plant that can cause an itchy skin rash in some people. Its leaves grow in groups of three, but the plant can still be hard to spot. If you accidentally touch poison ivy, wash the area with soap and water as soon as possible. The oil from the poison ivy plant can spread on clothes or even your dog.

To prevent a poison ivy rash, there are products you can apply to your skin before going into the woods. Stores that sell outdoor equipment and sporting goods may carry them.

## Staying Safe Outdoors

### Your Campsite

Roasting marshmallows and singing songs by an open fire are favorite camping activities. Adults, not kids, should start campfires. Adults also need to watch the fires and make sure they are out when you're done. Never leave a fire without anyone to watch it.

Don't forget to put out your fire by dumping water or shoveling dirt on it when you sleep or leave your campsite. Feel the ground around the area where the fire was to make sure it isn't warm.

### Your Food and Water

When you're exploring outdoors, eat or drink something only if an adult says it is safe. Even if streams or lakes look crystal clear, they could contain germs and the water may not be safe to drink. Bring bottled water to drink.

Likewise, never eat wild berries. Some are poisonous and it may be tough to know which are safe. Good snacks for the outdoors include fruit, trail mix, crackers, granola bars, bread, and peanut butter.

### Your Clothing

Wearing layers is a good idea when you're outdoors. That way, you can take off a layer or two if you get too warm. Wear comfortable boots when hiking so your ankles are well-supported and you don't get blisters. Keep your arms and legs covered while hiking to avoid ticks and insect bites and wear knee-high, loose-fitting boots when you are in an area with snakes. Make sure to take rain gear, such as ponchos and waterproof jackets, to keep you dry if an unexpected shower occurs.

### Wildlife

Although animals are cute to look at, wild animals are best enjoyed from far away. Don't go near or try to feed a strange animal. It's better to enjoy these animals at the zoo, in books, or on the Internet. To keep animals such as bears or wolves away from your campsite, keep it clean.

Food, and anything else the animal might smell, needs to be packed away. In fact some campers put all their food, even candy bars, in a bag (called a "Bear Bag") and hang it from a tree branch away from the campsite. If they can smell it, the animals will be led away from where the campers are.

### What if You Get Lost?

Stick with your group when you're in the woods. Carry a whistle and blow it. If you have a cell phone and it's working, use it to make contact with your group. If you do get lost, wait in a safe, sheltered place for an adult to find you. The sooner you're found, the sooner you can go back to having fun in the great outdoors!

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