

Home first aid kit

This factsheet is for people who would like information about preparing and storing first aid kits for use at home.

Why do I need a first aid kit?

Well over two million people attend accident and emergency departments each year after an injury at home.

People who have fallen over in the home make up over one million of these visits. Over 200,000 people had an accident while doing DIY. Burns, collisions and poisoning are also common causes of injury.

Preventing injuries is obviously better than curing them, so being aware of hazards, and taking sensible precautions against them, is a priority. But, in the event of an accident, you can use a first aid kit at home to deal with minor injuries, or to keep a serious injury stable while you seek help.

What should I include in a first aid kit for the home?

The following list can be used as a shopping list. The quantity of each item

is a guide only - the amount of each item you have will depend on the number of people in your home and the activities that you do at home.

Essential items

The items that you should ideally have in your first aid kit include:

- first aid manual
- 12 to 24 individually-wrapped plasters in various sizes (fabric or waterproof)
- sterile dressings, such as Melolin (for covering a wound): six medium (12cm x 12cm) and two large (18cm x 18cm)
- adhesive tape, such as Micropore (to hold dressings in place; it can also be used on its own on small cuts and grazes)
- six triangular bandages (for use as a sling to support an injured arm or shoulder)

This factsheet is based on reputable sources of medical evidence and has been reviewed by BUPA doctors. For more details of references and sources, please see our website. The content is intended for general information only and does not replace the need for personal advice from a qualified health professional.

- safety pins in a variety of sizes (for securing bandages)
- two crêpe bandages (to support sprains and strains, or to hold dressings in place)
- tubular bandage
- sterile non-fluffy, absorbent gauze (for cleaning and drying wounds and also for covering wounds)
- round-ended scissors (for cutting tape or bandages)
- tweezers (for removing objects such as splinters)
- vinyl gloves
- antiseptic wipes (alcohol free)
- emergency foil blanket
- note pad and pencil
- eyewash solution
- a thermometer (preferably digital and not one containing mercury as this can be a hazard if damaged).
- torch

Optional extras

Extra items that you may like to have in your first aid kit include:

- sterile eye pads (a large wound dressing can be used instead to cover an eye)
- skin closure strips (for holding the edges of a wound together)
- sterile saline sachets (for cleaning a wound) - but clean water will do

Containers for first aid kits

Keep your first aid items in a waterproof

container large enough for the contents to be arranged so that items can be found quickly when needed. A plastic container with a closely fitting lid would be suitable.

It is a good idea to label the box (for example with a green cross) so that it can be easily recognised by anybody.

Ready-made kits

There are many ready-made kits available that can be bought from a pharmacy or on the internet. Costs range from around £6 to over £30.

There is no official standard for first aid kits and the contents you need may vary according to what you want to use it for. The content of different kits therefore varies.

You should check the contents carefully. Some may not include all the items you need, while others contain more than you are likely to need or even some unnecessary items (such as cotton wool or alcohol wipes, which are now considered unsuitable for cleaning wounds).

If you make up a kit yourself, it might cost more than some ready-made kits, but you are more likely to end up with the contents that you need.

Storing your first aid kit

It makes sense to keep your first aid kit close to where it is most likely to be needed. It should be out of the reach of children, but still readily accessible

when needed. The place should be dry and cool, so the bathroom is probably not ideal.

Using your first aid kit

Just as important as keeping a first aid kit is knowing how to use what is in it. All adults, older children and teenagers living in the house should know where the kit is kept, what is in it and how to use it. It is a good idea to keep a first aid manual with the kit.

Replace any used items immediately and check expiry dates from time to time, so that you can discard and replace out-of-date items.

Medicines

There are some medicines that can be useful to keep at home in case of minor accidents. These include:

- antihistamine cream for insect bites (but not for use on broken or infected skin)
- paracetamol and ibuprofen for pain relief (tablets for adults, liquid for children)

- antihistamine tablets such as chlorpheniramine (eg Piriton), for allergic reactions

However, you should keep these medicines in a separate locked medicines cabinet, out of the reach of children. For further advice, ask your pharmacist.

Training

It is a good idea to get training in first aid. This is provided by organisations like St John Ambulance and the British Red Cross.

See below for how to contact them for details of training courses in your area.

Further information

St John Ambulance

☎ 08700 10 49 50
www.sja.org.uk

British Red Cross

☎ 0870 170 7000
www.redcross.org.uk