

The Day sailor's First Aid Kit: Medical Help Available in Less than 30 Minutes

Introduction

In the last Dock-on-Deck we discussed the importance of “time to professional medical help” as the single most important variable in determining the extent of medical supplies and training needed aboard. Based on this concept we divided the theoretical ‘complete medical chest’ into smaller user kits based on sailing needs. The simplest of these, and the one this installment of Doc-on-Deck will cover, is the “Day Kit” or “Deck Kit.”

The Doc-on-Deck Categories of kits

Category	Comments	Kit Type
	On-Board Medical Kits	Simple to complex
1) Day-Kit	Medical help available Within 30 minutes	Basic, single unit on Deck
2) Coastal Cruiser Kit	Medical help available Within several hours	2 units- Deck Kit and Multi-sectional Kit below decks
3) Distance Cruiser	Medical help available Within 24 hours	Complete, multi-unit medical kit with advanced
4) Deep Sea Sailor	Help may be days away	Medical Training and supplies

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This kit is simple and small. It can also serve as a more easily accessible “Day-Kit” for cruisers, carrying the usually needed items, and serving as a minor emergency adjunct to a larger medical chest carried aboard. On Raven, my 30-footer, this kit is kept readily assessable for the entire crew to use as needed and is the only kit used for day-sailing. Being used frequently, it is often taken with me on car trips and home for replenishment. It has been surprisingly useful on long car/road trips too! Raven's larger Medical Kit is kept separate, to be handled only by the ship's Medical Officer (that's me onboard Raven). The larger kit is built with ease of use in mind, employing logical subdivisions, based on Medical Systems.

For now, we will go over the subdivisions of Medical Systems as a general approach to constructing the Ship's Medical Chest. The subdivisions I use are the same that all medical texts use to divide the body and its illnesses for professional use worldwide (why reinvent the wheel?).

The list of subdivisions not only provides an easy and manageable way to acquire and access what one needs, but also provides a list to use to review these needs and supplies, and a checklist used to replenish these supplies. The idea is to minimize the confusion which always accompanies emergencies and to facilitate the medical help to the injured or ill crew. Refer to table one to see the general approach used in my “system”.

The Day sailor kit is not subdivided because of its small size. To build the Kit, which is a simple task, we will use a check-list. A copy of which should be kept with the kit and used to replenish it as needed. See table 2 for the details of this Kit.

The Doc-On-Deck Medical System: (table 1)

System Covered	Contents Covered	Comments
General		
Top of body/skin (HEENT)	Nose, Throat, Skin care and Allergies and cold treatments Fever medicines	patches, drops, tweezers see below details
Respiratory, chest, And Heart	Respiratory management of Airway, repository distress Infections, cardiac medications Inject able medicines	more complicated as time to medical help lengthens, training needed to use
Abdomen And Pelvis	Gastrointestinal medications Genitourinary medications Gynecological medications Severe sea sickness, anal preps Venereal disease medications	the routine commonly used meds in this group are kept in the Day Bag
Muscle-Skeletal and Sever skin problems (Mostly Medicines)	Muscle and joint problems Sprain management Pain management, wound infections Boils, sever burns	Notice that different antibiotics are kept in each section separate again for ease of use
Trauma Kit (Mostly Supplies)	Wound management dislocations, braces and splints Wound closure kits	these are supplies like bandages, skin staples and wound cleaning

It is best to label these sections for what they are and not by A, B, C, or 1, 2, 3 like they do in the kits you can buy. Obviously, the more extensive the Kit the more room it will take up. Except for the day kit that should be readily available to all, the Medical kit should be all in one spot and only handled by the designated medical officers aboard. If it is a husband and wife boat, then you are both the medical officers and you should both know this, and appreciate what it means! You both need to be able to manage and handle medical problems and the Med Kit on board. Other crew should not be handling the Med Kit. A log needs to be kept with the kit. Acutely 2 logs: One to document each time the kit is used and for what medical incident, and another to log the supplies that need to be replenished. The second log is a list of supplies that needs to be checked and updated with recorded expiration dates for medicines. I use a separate one for each system/section of the Kit. Remember that on board the captain is liable for any medications or treatments done to crew or guests. Keep a log, you never know when it may be needed in a court of law.

Building the Day Sailors Medical Kit: Step 1

Everyone's kit will probably be a little different. Using this system you can build a med kit that will suit your needs, and your crew's needs. Remember to think about the special needs any of your crew members may have, as well as your own. It is always a good idea to ask those you are sailing with if they have any medical problems that may pose a problem. Obviously for a day sail this is just a quick check, but for a cruise, a complete medical history should be obtained. This requires that you do a Q&A with crew members **before** you set sail. Best to be nosy in order that there not be unpleasant surprises and perhaps disaster later. That said; let's start building our kits using my system.

The Day Sailors Medical Kit (table 2): Step 2

System type covered	contents	comments
General and Top of Body	LOTS of Sunscreen and extra sunglasses are always part of Raven's Kit. Eye drops to relieve pain and itching. Eardrops . Antiseptic skin ointments . Ammonia inhalant. Tweezers . Nail Clippers . Q-Tips . Finger Splints . Band-Aids . Benadryl and allergies & Cold meds .	Don't forget extra hats and gloves too. Inexpensive but high UV protection cheap sunglasses can save someone's day! People forget, same goes for the sunscreen. Extra water should be included here too, and do not forget to pass it around frequently!
Chest and Respiratory	Bee Sting Kit . Asthma Medicine inhalers like Proventyl and Serevent.	Also good for sudden food allergies. Can be lifesaving! I carry an EPIPEN
Abdomen and lower body	Antacids , Mylanta, Alka Selzer, Prilosec. Antidiarrheals , Lomotil and Imodium-AD. Sea Sickness	For my hung-over crew, Alka Seltzer works great! Diarrhea is common and can routine your day. Prescription

	meds like Bonnie, Antivert, and Dramamine. Antifungal creams like Lotrozome. Senekot-S and MOM for constipation . Extra Tampons.	seasickness meds should not be generally available as they may be inadvertently administered to a sensitive person.
Musculoskeletal and trauma	Pain and fever meds like Aspirin, Advil and Tylenol. Muscle strain relief like Soma. Topical analgesic like Solarcaine and Xylocaine for sunburn and tooth and gum aches. A roll of gauze and medical tape. Antiseptic skin ointments like Bactroban and a few Ace Bandages . Mole Skin . Duct tape should be included here! Wound suture glue for small lacerations.	Likewise, prescription pain meds should be kept in the main medical kit and not generally available to the crew. Steri-strips should be replaced by wound glue in the new millennium. Nothing should be in this kit that needs a prescription!

Note: Children’s Medications and dosing should be carried when appropriate!

Discussion of the Contents in the Day Sailor’s Medical Kit: Step 3

As you can see the overall contents are small and easily placed in a convient container. For boats with a head, in one of the lockers there would be appropriate. On Raven we leave it out by the small galley.

In published surveys, sun related problems by far are the most common problem. The use of sunscreen is vital. You can never have too much, and it should be offered like water is to the crew! Remember to have a hypo allergic type on board for those with sensitive skin. Sunglasses are sunscreen for the eyes. Forget about the fact that you will reduce the incidence of cataracts and intra-ocular melanomas; headaches from the lack of sunglasses are more common than sunburn itself! Hats for they who forget to bring them. Gloves also and for general protection.

Eye drops and eardrops (like cortisporin ophthalmic and otic drops); especially if you permit swimming, will help save many a Sunday afternoons. Antiseptic (for cleaning and disinfecting) and analgesic (for pain relief) skin preparations are also quite commonly used. These supplies are readily available and easy to obtain. Insect bytes, and sea life “bytes”, as well as rope burns and getting a finger caught somewhere where it shouldn’t be are common uses for these supplies. Soap and water remain the best way to clean a wound!

Even if you do not have allergies yourself (lucky you), the conscientious skipper will carry antiallergy medications for those that are afflicted. I like Benadryl as it is very safe and has wide application in this area. Many others are available and I usually carry some Sudafed too. It too has wide application and can even help with seasickness. A bee sting kit may seem “over the top” to many of you. Yet, this can be the single most important thing you can carry to save a life. Although rare, this is one of those things that every second counts, and it is extremely easy to

administer. When I was 10 years old a kit at a friend's house saved my life after I was stung by several wasps. A similar kit saved my best friend's life after accidentally ingesting a piece of pineapple that he was allergic to. I assure you, it is not a waste of money to keep one around!

Antacids, anti-diarrheals, anti-constipation medications are a good idea to have around. Seasickness medicines will be covered in detail in a future Dock-On-Deck. I prefer Aspirin and Advil to Tylenol for pains on board as they are anti-inflammatory agents and can help relieve the soreness and swelling as well as the pain of minor injuries. This is also true of allergies and colds, as well as for minor sprains and muscle aches. Tylenol should be aboard for those that cannot take aspirin products.

Ammonia inhalants are used for reviving a crew who has fainted, which may have occurred let us say from sun stroke (see past Doc-On-Deck). If they do not immediately revive with this, then you know you have a much bigger problem!

A variety of different sized Band-Aids should be carried as well as 2 inch Ace Bandages (these are the elastic bandages). Duct tape works great in a pinch, and can be used to make a second skin over a rope burn or tape together bruised or broken fingers. Mole skin is best for use as a second skin covering in sensitive areas. If you use Duct-Tape, wait for it to fall off with soap and water; do not try to untape yourself. Elastic bandages are useful for sprains and wrapping up wounds, as well as prophylactically helping to strengthen joints.

Back pain is the number one complaint of people coming off boats after a day of fishing or sailing. Be aware of this and use preventative solutions before it becomes a real issue whenever possible. Advil is best for this acutely. For a strained back, a muscle relaxant like Robaxin and Aleve work well, especially in combination with pain and anti-inflammatory medications. Taking a prescribed medicine for this before you engage in strenuous activity is helpful.

Again, this is just a "Day Kit" and not meant to be encompassing. What is contained within should be safe enough for anyone onboard to handle, even children. Children's dosing is frequently different from adults, and this needs to be kept in mind.

Specific Crew Needs: step 4

Those general recommendations can be customized by adding what you think you need to each category. The conscientious skipper should question his crew about their specific needs and medical history. You should take it upon yourself to inform those not familiar with sailing, or fishing, that the boat will essentially be isolated from all help and medical help while you are underway. Supplies and medications not brought with you will not be available for some time while out there. As captain of your vessel, you need to make sure that the medical needs of the crew and passengers can be met, including in an emergency. You therefore need to know their specific health problems and needs. If you are day sailing, tell them help may be 30 minutes away if not an hour. If you do not have effective communication equipment, then it can be a lot longer (and you really are no longer in the day sailor category). They may choose not to come when you explain this. You will be better off if that is true!

A diabetic may need to bring extra insulin and a testing kit. A cardiac patient may need to bring some extra meds like a Nitro pill. There should be no shame in this and it should not be a deterrent for them to go out and enjoy a good sail. Just be prepared and safe, that is all. In an emergency this information can save a life.

If you have children aboard, they ALWAYS have special needs! Medically specking it is no different. Appropriate children's drugs and dosages of other needed drugs should be carried for them. Also remember that they can get into things. Access to the Medical kit should be denied to them. If they are old enough, simply tell them where it is, what it is, and that they are never to enter it without supervision. If they are really young, lock it away as needed. It is a good idea to not have anything in the kit that if they sneak into it can do any real harm.

It is important for paddlers of Kayaks and Canoes to understand that they are in a boat and the same rules apply. They all have room for a day-kit and a means of communication. If you know people doing this, remind them. Paddleboards can present a special problem. They are usually used close to a beach, mooring or club area, and close to shore. But sometimes I have seen them fairly far out. Getting paddlers in general educated is a priority for all of us.

As a last point. When you go out on a boat, make sure you know what you are getting yourself into. If the boat is ill prepared, a short day sail can turn into a life threatening experience. One of the key elements to a safe voyage is being able to effectively communicate with help and having someone watching out for you. Leaving a float plan with someone who cares is a good idea. This is along with being able to signal for help. In my book, you are only a **day sailor** if you can get help within an average of a half an hour!

I think we should all use the "IMSAFE" check list for ourselves and our guests:

- **Illness** – Are we suffering from any [illness](#) or symptom of an illness which might affect us during the trip?
- **Medication** - Is anyone currently taking any [drugs](#) (prescription or over-the-counter) that cloud judgement or impair functioning?
- **Stress** – Are we overly worried about other factors in life? The psychological pressures of everyday living can be a powerful distraction and consequently affect performance.
- **Alcohol** - Although [legal limits](#) vary by jurisdiction (0.04 BAC, any consumption in the past 8 hours or current impairment in the USA^[2]), we should consider our alcohol consumption within the last 8 to 24 hours.
- **Fatigue** – Have we had sufficient [sleep](#) and adequate nutrition?
- **Emotion** – Have we fully recovered from any extremely upsetting events such as the loss of a family member?

Be safe out there-R/C Gino C. Bottino, MD