



It's vital for any camper or hiker to know what to do if a snake bites you. But, more importantly, what you should do to avoid getting into that situation in the first place. Writing the title of this article, let alone the content, makes me shudder. And each encounter with a snake during my camping expeditions has given me heart palpitations. However, it's an irrational fear as there are rarely any deaths from snakes in Australia. Knowing a little bit about snake behaviour and adopting these easy tips could not only save your life but also help you enjoy your camping trip with more confidence.

Tips for staying safe around snakes

1. Wear appropriate clothing

Nearly all snake bites occur on the ankles, hands and lower parts of the legs so covering up these areas will significantly reduce the possibility that a snake's venom will enter your bloodstream.

You might think you need to wear metal armour to prevent a snake injecting venom, but most venomous snakes in Australia have relatively short fangs and tend to wipe venom into the wound rather than inject it deep into the skin. A good pair of gaiters or jeans will make it more or less impossible for an Australian snake to penetrate the skin.

It goes without saying that you should wear closed footwear. Not only will it protect your feet, but it also creates more vibrations than sandals or thongs. This will help scare snakes away before you reach them.



Closed shoes and gaiters are a must for heading into snake territory. Photo: Melanie Rees

2. Carry first aid

Whether you're going for a short hike or a long camping trip, it's a good idea to be prepared for the possibility of a snake bite. Your first aid kit should contain pressure immobilisation bandages - heavy crepe bandages are ideal in fact.

3. Ensure you have some form of communication

If you're in an area with no mobile reception, try to source another form of communication or at least let someone, such as a Park Ranger, know your movements. A PLB is an important piece of kit to carry if you're heading to remote areas.

One of the crucial things, if bitten, is to keep the injured limb immobilised, so you'll need to stay still. Then use a PLB to call for help.

3. Be vigilant when hiking

Snakes are incredibly shy creatures and most will feel your foot vibrations and get out of the way before you even see them. There are exceptions though. When snakes are just warming up, they can be slower to react to your presence, and if taken by surprise they can strike



without warning.

The main tip for hiking is to watch where you're walking. When hiking over logs and rocks, it's a good idea to step on the log and then over it, to make sure you can see the other side. Some snakes may also hide in nooks in rock faces or sun themselves on rock ledges so always make sure you can see where you're putting your hands. Or wear gloves and a long sleeve shirt if you're climbing up a rocky path.

Of course, watching where you walk is easier said than done. When you're bushwalking, you're usually looking at your surroundings, not where you're putting your feet, which is why it's important to carry first aid equipment and wear proper protection.



Keeping your site clean is hugely important to prevent snakes from hiding under your gear. Photo: Melanie Rees

4. Keep your campsite clean

Snakes love mice. If you leave rubbish around the camping ground, it can attract rodents and hence snakes. There are many reasons to keep your campsite clean, but if you ever needed an additional incentive, this is it. Snakes also like to hide under things, so keep picnic rugs and other items off the ground when you're away from the campsite.

5. Check your sleeping bags & boots

Because snakes see humans as a threat, it's incredibly unlikely that a snake will come into a campsite while you're there. But they could curl up in warm places like your sleeping bag if you leave them in the open while you're out.

It's always a good idea to keep sleeping bags closed up in your tent or the in back of the car while you're out hiking. If you forget, shaking them out is good practice, just to make sure you don't cuddle up with any unwanted visitors at night.

The same goes for shoes. Boots are a bit like hollow logs and even a metre long snake could hide in them. If you're paranoid like me, you can stuff socks in your boots at night and shake them out in the morning.

6. Be careful when collecting firewood

If you have permission to collect firewood, it's a good idea to wear a long-sleeved shirt and gloves, as snakes often hide under leaf litter and logs.

If collecting wood at night, I always carry a torch to ensure I can see where I'm putting my hands and that the stick I'm picking up is indeed a stick.

What to do if you encounter a snake:

1. If you see a snake, stay calm, back away and wait for it to move. Snakes will only strike humans when they feel threatened.
2. Don't provoke it or make any sudden movements that they could perceive as a threat.



3. Never try to kill a snake.
4. Like all native animals, they're protected, but also the majority of bites occur when people try to kill them.
5. If the snake won't move, don't poke it with a stick or shovel. Many snakes can strike quickly from a distance.
6. While foot stamping might encourage a snake to move off a track, I'd personally only do this if I am a long distance from the snake (i.e. at least several metres) as it can still be seen as a threatening action, especially if the snake is cornered.



Take the time to learn how to treat a snake bite in case the worst happens. Photo: SA Ambulance Service

Treat all snakes with caution

Treat all snakes as potentially dangerous, even if they're tiny. Baby snakes are just as dangerous as adults are, if not more so. This is partly because they're more difficult to spot, but they also tend to be more skittish and unpredictable. Even treat dead snakes as dangerous. Snakes can still have biting reflexes and the venom can remain on the fangs long after its death.

Treating a snakebite

1. Treat all suspected snakebites as life-threatening.
2. In Australia, bites might just look like a superficial scratch and not the two puncture wounds you might expect.
3. Apply a pressure immobilisation bandage to the limb immediately, splint the limb and call an ambulance.
4. Even in a remote location, you should keep the limb immobilised and stay calm and still.
5. The bandage should be applied to the whole length of the limb and be as tight as you would strap a sprained ankle.
6. Never wash or cut the wound, as the hospital will use venom on the skin to identify the snake.
7. Don't suck out the venom and don't apply a tourniquet instead of an immobilisation bandage.

First aid and snake awareness courses are a good idea if you want specific information as well.

Managing your fear of snakes

It might be reassuring to know that even though Australia is infamous for its venomous



snakes and we love the outdoors, there are far fewer deaths in Australia than America, India, Africa and many other countries.

It's rare for Australian snakes to strike. It's even more uncommon that the fangs will get through clothing and the skin. When they do, most snakes don't actually inject any venom or it's in such small amounts that antivenom isn't needed.

So, there you have it, what every camper should know about snakes

If you wear the right clothing, go prepared and stay vigilant, it's unlikely you will ever get into a situation where you won't be able to confidently enjoy your holiday.

It's important that you're prepared, so ensure you have a [snake bite kit](#) and [first aid kit](#) on you at all times. You might even come to love our slithering friends. After all, they really are beautiful creatures and crucial to the Australian bushland.

Have you ever had a close encounter with a snake in the bush? Let us know in the comments.