

BEFORE the ER

If you injure yourself seriously, here's a practical guide to what to do (quickly) before you trek to the hospital.

You've done something dumb or something has gone wrong in the shop. Now the question going through your head is, "Should I go to the ER with this?" As my father used to say, "If you're asking the question, that's the answer." So what should you do now? A few basic rules and some common sense can make you more comfortable and help ensure the best outcome.

First, the easy stuff:

Life-threatening Injuries

This means anything that could kill you, such as poisoning, electrocution, chest pain, difficulty breathing or arterial bleeding (blood isn't just running out, it's

squirting out – with your pulse – and the squirts are jumping over your finger onto the floor).

Decide if the injury is life- or limb-threatening. If it is, call 911, keep quiet and wait for rescue. Lie down. That way if you do faint, you won't injure yourself further by falling. Apply gauze and direct pressure to any bleeding. Be advised that if you use a tourniquet to stop the bleeding, you may lose the extremity.

Assuming your injury isn't life-threatening but is more than you can fix with duct tape (no kidding), don't panic. It's often said in medicine that the first thing to do in an emergency is to take your own pulse, and there's truth to it.

Something in Your Eye

If it really hurts it will probably be chemical, organic (wood, etc.), metallic or glass. The worst is chemical, with alkali worse than acid, followed closely by organic (some plants also contain alkaloids that can be very caustic). Whatever it was, first rinse the eye out with lots of clean, clear water, then have someone drive you to the nearest ER (do not drive; you have no depth perception with only one eye). If it was metal or glass, keep the eye closed to minimize more damage.

Puncture Wounds

This is a hole deeper than it is wide. If you've just shot a nail through an extremity, don't pull it out. The nail may be keeping a blood vessel from bleeding.

Gently wrap the area and get help. If you've stepped on a nail and pulled it out, still get to the doctor anyway. There is an 80-percent chance some of your shoe went into your foot and will need to be removed.

Bleeding

Again, rinse and apply gauze and direct pressure to any open cut. A cut through the skin that's deep enough to allow separation of the cut edges will require stitches.

Fractures

Fractures of an extremity can be stabilized by gently rolling a good-quality magazine around it and tying or taping it in place. Be sure to check for a pulse on the extremity before and after stabilization. If any bone is showing, don't touch it, and call 911.

Burns

Immerse the wound in cold water (it will still be burned, but will hurt less). If there's a blister, don't break it. A blister is still intact skin and less prone to infection. If the area is white or black and does not hurt, it's a third-degree burn and you should call 911.

Amputated Limb

If you've cut off a finger with your table saw, apply gauze and pressure to the wound. Call 911, then wrap the amputated part in a wet cloth, put that in a sealed plastic bag and onto ice. Then someone should drive you to the ER.

But no matter what else don't panic. If you stop and think before you act, most emergencies can be stabilized until evaluated by the professionals. **PW**

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