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## Essential first aid items for your home

We all like to be prepared for emergency medical situations at home, especially those of us living with children, the elderly or anyone particularly accident-prone. From covering up a cut to treating a severe burn, a well-stocked first aid kit can prove pivotal to a patient's recovery.

'You never know when you will need a first aid kit. It's not only useful for putting a plaster on a small cut, but also for more serious ailments from severe bleeding to broken bones,' says Isobel Kearl, product implementation officer at [St John Ambulance](#).

'Immediate first aid attention can lessen the likelihood of injuries getting worse. Even small cuts and grazes can become infected if left untreated and, if sepsis takes hold, they can become life-threatening. By treating injuries with a sterile wipe and dressing the wound appropriately, this risk can be dramatically reduced.'

Kearl recommends these essential first aid kit items for every home:

- Sterile medical wipes – useful to clean cuts and grazes, and other small wounds.
- Waterproof plasters to keep small injuries clean.
- Fabric plaster strip – if the wound is bigger or awkwardly shaped, you can cut your own plasters to size.
- Adhesive wound dressing to protect wounds from dirt and germs.
- Low-adherent wound dressing to protect wounds from dirt and germs, while allowing the skin to breathe and providing cushioning.
- Crepe bandage to provide support for sprains and strains, and hold dressings in place.

- Stretch bandage to keep dressings in place, especially in awkward areas like joints.
- Microporous tape to hold dressings in place, or used alone for minor cuts and grazes.
- Safety pins to secure bandages or slings.
- Triangular bandage to make a sling or used to hold dressings in place in awkward areas.
- Eye pad dressing for minor eye injuries.
- Eye wash phial to wash a foreign body out of the eye.
- Burn gel sachets to absorb and disperse heat from burn injuries if no water is available.
- Heat-retaining foil blanket for treating shock or hypothermia.
- Instant ice pack for reducing swelling in sprains and strains.
- Disposable gloves to prevent infections to yourself and the patient – go for nitrile if you're worried about latex allergies.
- Tweezers or a splinter remover.
- Blunt-ended scissors to cut bandages or a patient's clothing to access a wound.

### **Did you know?**

Sticking plasters were invented in 1920. American Earle Dickinson, who worked for Johnson & Johnson, made plasters out of gauze and adhesive tape for his accident-prone wife, who often cut and burned herself while cooking. A year later, his employers started selling them under the label Band-Aid®.

## **When to replace your items**

When stored correctly, nitrile gloves have a shelf life around four years. Any topical creams or ointments have an expiration date around three years. You should also check for any dates printed on to tubes or packaging.

For sterile medical wipes and eye wash, always check the expiration date as the seal may have become compromised over time and caused contamination.

Many ice packs don't have expiration dates; however, some companies advise replacing them every few years as the plastic may have degraded causing them to leak.

## Alternative first aid equipment

If you can't get to a first aid kit, there are some household items that will double up as first aid equipment too. These include:

- Tweezers to remove ticks or splinters (not bee stings as they can push more venom into the skin) – sterilise beforehand with boiling water or rubbing alcohol.
- A credit card for removing a bee stings – try scraping it across the surface of your skin so the stinger catches the edge and is pushed up.
- Distilled white vinegar – this can be used to treat mild cuts and abrasions when diluted in a 50/50 mixture of water and vinegar, but beware that it may sting.
- A bag of frozen vegetables can be used in place of an ice pack.
- Duct tape can be used to seal an open wound – use a clean piece of cloth, such as an old T-shirt, between the skin and the tape to help protect the wound but make sure it's not so tight that it cuts off circulation.

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<b>Last updated by:</b> Danny Chadburn 19/10/2017	
<b>Peer reviewed by:</b> Dr Sarah Jarvis MBE, FRCGP 19/10/2017	

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