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Ten Unconventional Additions to Your Emergency Medical Kit

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This article has been kindly contributed by Lizzie Bennett at www.MedicallySpeaking.com ^[1]

Okay, I am sure you all have a medical kit to be proud of, you've got all the bandages, the slings, the ointments and creams, but sometimes, just sometimes, the most mundane items can make life simpler, especially if you need to move fast, or find yourself in a situation where you need to improvise, or, the stuff you have just isn't right for the job in hand. Here are a few ideas, and examples of what to use them for.

AN OLD CREDIT CARD/ATM CARD These are great for a good deal more than stuffing in a hole in the wall of your bank. Scraping out a sting with the edge of a plastic card is preferable to fingernails or tweezers, both of which, just by the pinching action pump the last bit of venom from the sting into the skin. Cut into strips they are excellent splints for broken fingers, and the gaps between the strips allow for swelling. Position either side of the finger and tape into place.

Used whole they can help inflate a deflated lung caused by a sucking chest wound. Put over the hole and tape on three sides only, the card acts as a flutter valve, preventing air from entering the wound but allowing air outside of the lung but inside the chest cavity to escape as the lung inflates.

DUCT TAPE

I love duct tape, it needs to be good tape, not a cheapo one that is not very sticky. Use to secure the card to the chest as described above. It can be used to hold splints on limbs in place, to secure pressure dressings, and even to make a makeshift stretcher to carry a casualty if wrapped around two poles and stuck to itself across the gap between them. There are dozens of uses for this stuff.

A DOZEN MIXED SIZE CLEAR PLASTIC BAGS

Clear plastic bags form a great barrier between a wound and the air, preventing pathogens from getting into the body. They are great for wounds and burns on hands and feet and are carried in ambulances for this reason. Duct tape into place and the wound will stay clean until you can deal with it. This is particularly beneficial if you are near water and you want to prevent contamination.

Use as a flutter valve on large sucking chest wounds. Fix on three sides as described for the card method above.

SANITARY PADS

Sanitary pads make really good pressure dressings. Put over the wound and tape tightly down covering the whole pad with tape, extend the tape a good distance from all edges of the pad to make sure the pressure is maintained.

HALF A DOZEN STRONG TEA BAGS

Tea leaves contain tannin which has anti-inflammatory and vaso-constrictor properties. To wash out an eye make as you would tea, leave to cool and lean forward so the liquid in the container reaches the eye and open and close the eye whilst in the liquid. The tea bag can be placed on the eye afterwards, to reduce any swelling and irritation.

Tannin is a vasoconstrictor, it causes blood vessels to contract and therefore slows blood loss. It would be no use at all for anything major, but for nosebleeds, traumatic tooth extractions

and minor cuts and abrasions, it works well. Put just enough boiling water on the tea bag to make it swell to its maximum size and show a little liquid leaking from it, then when it has cooled sufficiently apply it to the tooth socket, cut etc. for nose bleeds roll the bag as small as you can and plug the nostril with as much of it as you can, you can cut it in half if need be and roll so as the cut edge is on the inside of the roll. There is no worry about sterility with a nose bleed.

STRONG SMELLING VAPOUR RUB

There are times when the smells around you are almost too much to bear. Infected wounds, corpses, human waste all give off gut-wrenching odours and dabbing vapour rub under your nose helps a great deal.

I have heard occasionally that a dab under the nose of someone having an asthma attack, who does not have an inhaler with them, helps open the airways a little making breathing somewhat easier. I have no experience of this and therefore cannot vouch for it. Having said that an asthma sufferer without an inhaler will not come to any harm by trying this.

A SECTION OF BICYCLE TYRE INNER TUBE

The inner tube from a bicycle tyre is very stretchy and it makes an excellent tourniquet. It is also possible to use it as a fire starter, and it will burn even when it is pouring with rain, and it burns for a long while, often long enough to dry out a little damp tinder placed very near it.

A SUPER ABSORBANT DRYING CLOTH

These microfibre cloths are very light weight and take up almost no space. They are excellent for drying around wounds so that dressings and tapes stick more easily. As they hold a good amount of liquid, one dunked in water and lightly squeezed out is useful for giving a casualty that cannot sit properly sips of water, they just suck on the cloth.

AN EMPTY SODA BOTTLE

Cut off the top and bottom and then cut it along it's length. This gives you a sheet of strong plastic that rolls back into a tube when you let it go. These make great splints, keeping clothing etc away from a wound or helping to immobilise a broken bone. Unroll, place around the limb and gently let it go back into its tube shape. Then, very gently, close the plastic up, one edge will slide under the other with little effort. Fix in place with a piece of tape. To store, roll it up tight and secure with a rubber band. We used this method in hospitals to stop babies and toddlers ripping off their dressings, works very well.

A PAIR OF ADULT OVER THE KNEE SOCKS

Get an adult pair of knee high socks and force them over a large, full soda bottle to stretch them. When stretched for a couple of days, roll them down the bottle so what you end up with resembles a donut, store them in this shape so that they can be rolled onto a limb rather than forced up over it causing pain and possibly more injury. They are great for holding a leg dressing in place, and make a good sling for arm injuries. Roll onto the arm, position the arm comfortably and safety pin to the patients clothing in a couple of places, beats messing about with a triangular bandage if you are in a hurry. If they have long sleeves, position the arm and pin the sleeve to the body of their clothing.

Well there you have it, a few conventional items with a few unconventional uses.

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