

Inside People: No day at the beach?

by Jennifer Goodwin

Anytime you commune with nature and hordes of hot, sweaty humans, you have to keep your wits about you. The beach is no exception.

Parents brave heatstroke just loading the cooler, Boogie boards, chairs and kids into the car. Finding parking requires a ruthlessness usually reserved for the mall in December. And hauling all the gear across the sand can leave you feeling like you've been stranded in the Mojave.

Don't let any of that deter you. Water temperatures have risen above bone-chilling this time of year. Who can resist?

Before you break out the Bain de Soleil, here's some advice on handling shoreline mishaps - some serious and some not so - to help make sure your day at the beach is like a day at the beach.

What should you do if your bikini strap breaks?

Wardrobe malfunctions are so 2004. Today, it's all about the semi-planned nipple slip. Just ask gals like Jessica Alba, Tara Reid, Lindsay Lohan, Keira Knightley and Mischa Barton. If you experience the big "Whoops," hold your head up high and be thankful it's only a gaggle of German tourists - nothing they haven't seen before, honey - and not the paparazzi capturing the moment.

What should you do if you get sand in your eyes?

Flush the eyes with bottled water. Lifeguards will help if you don't have any.

How can you protect your sandwich from swarming sea gulls?

NO DAY AT THE BEACH? - Sand and sea can be painful, but remedies are at hand. CNS Illustration by Jacie Landeros.

Sea gulls, a catch-all name for several species, don't like falcons or spikes, said Don Croll, a University of California Santa Cruz professor of ecology and evolutionary biology. Short of taking along a bird of prey, store your food in something sturdy. Overflowing trash cans and plentiful garbage dumps mean more and more

gulls on the prowl.

What should you do if you feel an excruciating pain in your foot/calf?

You've probably stepped on a stingray that whacked you with its venomous, spiny tail in retaliation, said Lt. Greg Buchanan of the San Diego Lifeguard Service. Stingrays are plentiful this year. Lifeguards will immerse your foot in very hot water to break down the venom. Seek medical attention. To avoid an encounter, do the "stingray shuffle": drag your feet as you walk to roust them from their sandy bottom hangout.

What should you do if a massive wave is about to break on your head?

If you're in deep water, take a deep breath and dive, head first. The force of the wave dissipates rapidly as depth increases. But make sure you know how deep the water is to begin with to prevent neck injuries.

What should you do if you're approached by a man wearing a Speedo?

Do a quick scan of the belly-to-body-hair ratio to determine if he's a member of the U.S. Olympic Men's Swim Team. If not, quickly scatter french fries around you in a defensive circle. Bring on the sea gulls.

How can you save someone from drowning?

Ocean rescues can be dangerous even for strong swimmers. Your best bet is always hailing a lifeguard, calling 911 or using the emergency call boxes on some beaches. If you absolutely must go in, bring along anything that floats - Boogie board, surfboard, even a cooler or beach ball. Throw it to the victim and yell for help.

What should you do if stung by a jellyfish?

Scrape off tentacles with the edge of a credit card. Lifeguards will neutralize the venom with a hot vinegar bath; at home, pat meat tenderizer on the wound, said Jeffrey Graham, a marine biologist with Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego. Jellyfish venom is a protein. Meat tenderizers degrade protein.

What should you do if get a jagged cut?

If it's a minor cut, it's probably still OK to go in the water, said podiatrist Dr. James Longobardi, unless you're diabetic, in which case any foot injury needs to be taken seriously. At home, wash the wound with soap and water, apply Neosporin and a Band-Aid. For deeper puncture wounds, seek medical attention.

How can you fend off a shark?

Kick or hit the shark in its most sensitive areas, the eyes and gills, advises the "Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook." Too bad "most people never see the shark that attacks them," said marine biologist Graham. And a hungry Great White will chomp off that extremity faster than you can say "Jaws III should never have been made." To avoid an attack, swim in groups, stay close to shore, avoid the water at night when sharks are most active, and avoid areas where seals or sea lions sunbathe.

How can you extract yourself from a rip current?

A riptide is a fast, narrow current that can pull swimmers out to sea. Ask lifeguards where the riptides are before you go in. If you do get caught in one, don't fight it. Stay calm and swim parallel to shore until can make your way back in.

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