



## HOW TO UPDATE YOUR FIRST AID KIT

First aid kits are one of the most essential parts of your emergency preparedness kit. It is important to put together or purchase a quality kit that will have all the items needed for basic and more serious or traumatic injuries. Think of it as an insurance policy - When it comes to saving a life, you'll be glad you had what you needed, when you needed it. We never know when it will be needed, so let's make sure your first aid kit is updated and ready for use!

### DO FIRST AID KITS EXPIRE?

Yes. Many of the items in a first aid kit expires between 3 – 5 years from the date of manufacture. You should periodically inspect the items in your first aid kit to make sure that they haven't expired. Inspecting your first aid kits should be included in your annual routine when reviewing your emergency preparedness gear (72-hour kits, first aid, fire extinguishers, fuel supply, etc.). You may even consider checking/updating twice per year – spring and winter. If you live in a climate with drastic temperature changes, it may affect your gear more than mild climates. Choose a timeframe that works for you and try to make it a habit.

### INSPECTING YOUR FIRST AID KIT

- Take your kit out and brush off the dust! It's actually a good thing if you don't need your first aid kit all the time, but it's good to keep everything as clean as possible!
- Remove the contents and lay them out in a clean area so you can inspect each one.
- Check the use by or expiration date of each item. If it's expired, remove from your first aid kit (NOTE: keep reading! Some items may be useful beyond the expiry or use by date, but may lose their potency or usefulness over time).
- Inspect each item that's within its date carefully. If there are any tears, leaks, openings, breaks in the packaging, or generally look suspicious, you should remove them.
- Replace any items that you removed and repack the first aid kit.

\*The FDA requires manufacturers to put an expiration date on most first aid, prescription, and over the counter medications. Most items don't magically stop working beyond their expiration date, however, they do tend to lose potency, go rancid, or lose elasticity/stickiness over time – so here's what I do:

#### BANDAGES

*Band-aids* are normally good for at least 5 years after the manufacture date. Periodically pull one out and test it to make sure that the adhesive is still good. If there are no stains or discoloration on the packaging and the adhesive still works, they should be good.

*Sterile and non-sterile gauze* – Some have expiration dates and some don't. Inspect the packaging to make sure that they are in good condition. If the packaging is wet, moldy, stained, torn, or damaged in any way, it should be thrown away.

Gauze is clean so don't hang onto it if you think it could be contaminated

*Israeli-style bandages* are sterile and usually have two layers of plastic over them. You may be able to go beyond the expiration date, but keep in mind – these are meant to apply pressure to wounds and need to be strong and in perfect condition. Materials can degrade over time, especially if they are exposed to abuse, sunlight, or moisture.

*Triangular bandages* sometimes have an expiration date. They're usually used as slings, improvised splints, and all kinds of other things. These are generally made out of cloth, so if they're expired, I wouldn't worry too much about it. Again, make sure the packaging is not damaged and there is no contamination or discoloration.

*Burn bandages/treatments* have an expiration because they're impregnated with a gel that keeps them from adhering to burns. These are items that you'd want to stick pretty closely with the expiration date. Over time, the gels can become sticky or gummy and not be suitable for their intended use on burns.

*Hemostatic Bandages* (CeloX, QuikClot, etc.) are good when the outer package isn't damaged and they haven't expired. Replacing these items when expired is a good idea because they're too important to not have them working properly if you actually need them.

## **MEDICATIONS**

Medications are required by law to have expiration dates on them. These dates are usually a lot earlier than when they would actually start to lose their effectiveness, and the FDA has admitted that most medications could be extended beyond their expiration dates and still be effective. HOWEVER, medications (prescription and over the counter) do have an expiry date for a reason. While many medications will lose effectiveness/potency over time, some have been proven to INCREASE potency over time which could cause serious issues with dosage.

Things like heat and humidity can also decrease the amount of time that medications are good for.

Replacing expired medications good practice because you want to make sure that they're as effective as possible when needed.

Other medications like sting and bite kits, antibiotic ointments, and hydrocortisone creams should also be replaced when they expire. These type of items can go rancid, change color and consistency, and like most other common items in a first aid kit, they will lose their effectiveness as they age.

## **INSTANT COLD/HEAT COMPRESSES**

Instant ice and heat packs normally expire about 3 years after the date of manufacture. These should be replaced because there's nothing worse than really needing one of these and they don't work! The ingredients inside lose their effectiveness and ability to react with each other over time.

## **GLOVES**

Latex and nitrile gloves are actually pretty delicate, especially when the packaging has been compromised or are not even packaged at all. They tend to break or tear easily and are completely useless once they get old.

Replace these when they expire or if the packaging is torn or damaged.

## **TAPE**

Test your tapes and stretch bandages every year. The adhesive and elastic in tape will break down in extreme temperatures and over time. Adhesives will either lose their tackiness or get gummy, and you don't want to treat a wound with that!

If the tape has water damage, stains, is no longer sticky, or is getting gummy it should be replaced.

## **SCISSORS / FORCEPS / TWEEZERS / STERILE BLADES**

Metal items like scissors, tweezers, and scalpels don't expire, but they can get contaminated and no longer be sterile. If the packaging has gotten wet, torn, opened, or damaged in any other way, then assume that they're not sterile and can't be used for any application that needs sterile instruments.

## **WHERE TO GET REPLACEMENT ITEMS AND REFILL PACKS FOR YOUR FIRST AID KIT**

We have you covered here at Sophos Survival! We have first aid supplies, refill packs, and fully assembled first aid and survival kits to keep you prepared for emergencies.

To make it easy, we have designed first aid refill packs to help you easily and inexpensively restock your kits. Rather than having to go and buy large quantities of each item, you can grab or order a refill pack to replace used or expired items.

### **Refill options:**

Bleeding | Blister

CPR

Gauze (with or without QuikClot)

Medications

Ointments

Wipes | Pads

Sprain | Fracture | Tape

Visit [sophosurvival.com](http://sophosurvival.com) or stop by the store for more info and options.

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