

The Rules of Three - For Outdoor Survival
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Webmaster comments in bold red

This is a good article that helps put survival requirements in perspective. Much of the information comes out of military field manuals. Patty and I spend a lot of time in the wilderness and are constantly amazed at the people we see who are just poking along with no water, no equipment and no preparation should the unexpected arise. We carry lots of water (in a CamelBak), space blankets, first aid supplies, protein bars and rain gear. We take the stuff necessary to spend a night or two in the field if necessary. So far, we haven't had to.

It is interesting to note that survival can be broken down into RULES OF THREE. These rules of three can be instrumental in providing a checklist or packing list for things to take on your next trip.

You can last 3 MINUTES without air.

If you are taking a scuba trip, you will want to pack plenty of air tanks for you and those traveling with you for the number of hours you wish to be under water. Another thing to consider is your altitude. Are you going to be high in the mountains where breathing could become a problem? Consider where you will be going and determine if sufficient air/oxygen would be present. If not, plan on how you will be provided with the amount of air you will need.

You can last 3 HOURS without shelter.

If you're hiking (or lost) and the sun is about to set, you want to make sure you have a good shelter to protect you from the cold. Make it just large enough to accommodate you and not much else. This is important, especially in cold climates, because your body heat may well have to heat it. Be extremely careful if you are going to use fire to heat the shelter, as most natural shelter materials are flammable! Plan ahead, and use common sense. If you are hiking in a desert, you'll want a shelter to provide shade.

Most of the time, though, you'll be trying to keep warm. Use everything you can think of for insulation. Crawling inside a big pile of leaves or pine needles is actually pretty warm and comfortable (do not attempt this near a fire). A large pile of fresh pine sprigs is not only a springy mattress, but is good insulation from the ground.

You can last 3 DAYS without water.

While you may be able to last three days without water, you will start to feel the effects of dehydration after only 12 hours or so. Your brain is made up of 70% water and will not think clearly without plenty of water. It is important to know ahead of time the kinds of water supplies you will have at the location you will be at. Is there a stream running through? Will you have to take water purifying items? Will you have to carry all of your water in with you?

You must drink plenty of water even if you do not feel thirsty. An adult should drink at least a couple of liters per day (more in hot climates). If you spent the night on high ground, then plan on moving camp. In most areas, just continue to walk downhill and you will eventually find water. Watch animals or follow their tracks. They will usually lead to water. Birds also tend to congregate near water. In dry areas, you may have to consider other means, such as a solar still. If you are getting water from streams or ponds, boil before drinking, or use water purification tablets or straw.

You can last 3 WEEKS without food.

Many people make food their priority. Even though your stomach may be growling of hunger, your body can last much longer without food than without water or shelter. Only after taking care of those needs first, should you worry about food. Will you be able to catch your food from the rivers or streams? Will there be game for you to hunt? Or will you carry all of your food with you? What about pots and pans? Will you have a stove to cook on or will you cook over a fire? Your camping location will determine what options you have for food. You will also want to consider dishwashing liquid, SOS pads, grill scrapers, aluminum foil, etc. Camping is more tolerable when your hunger cries are answered with enough food to sustain your activities.

With that being said, if you find yourself in an unplanned situation where you need to rely on your surroundings for food, as a general rule, avoid plant life unless you know for a fact that something is edible. Stay away from mushrooms and any plant that has a milky sap. Common edible plants include cattail roots, acorns, clover, dandelions, almost all grasses that are seed bearing and the inner bark of trees such as Poplar, Willows, Birches and Conifers.

The easiest rule to remember is that if it walks, swims, crawls, or slithers... thump it, and muck it on down! Small animals, fish and insect life are always your best bet (remember, do not eat spiders or anything else with more than 6 legs). Use the knife, hooks and line, make a spear, make snares with the 80lb test cord. Setting multiple snares and fishing lines in ways that you do not have to baby-sit them is a good idea. Check them from time to time for a catch. This allows you to "hunt" without expending much energy. Use your imagination! The facts are, ALL fur bearing animals are edible. ALL birds are edible with no exceptions. Grubs found in rotten logs are edible, as are almost all insects (6 legs).

You can last 3 MONTHS without companionship.

If you are alone for 3 months or longer you will either go insane or you will develop a relationship with God. Like Tom Hanks in the movie, "Castaway", you will have to invent your own Wilson, or you will turn to God for companionship. Human beings were designed to interact with others, so if you are going to live on your own for longer than 3 months, consider bringing a companion along or plan on having someone "show up" for a weekend or two to help you get through the loneliness.

These rules of three can provide any camper with the proper frame of mind when faced with survival situations. I hope that you will be able to benefit from these rules and memorize them.