

# FIRST AID KITS



## FOR LONG-DISTANCE RIDERS

**A**s long-distance riders, we are probably more aware than most of the inherent risks to our bikes and our bodies as we challenge ourselves in environments of inclement weather, hypo or hyperthermia, fatigue, illness, mechanical failure, animal or vehicle collisions, and the list goes on. Hopefully, we remember to stack the deck in our favor by choosing and using appropriate riding apparel, participating in rider training, taking care of our medical and physical needs, maintaining our bikes in safe operating condition, engaging in thoughtful trip planning; and riding within our limits. And yet — even with all of these precautions — “stuff” still happens. As this relates to first aid supplies, we need to be prepared. There are several factors that dictate which preparations are the most relevant. I like to categorize these factors as the “Five D’s.”

**DESTINATION.** Perhaps most obvious is the locale and environment of the planned ride. A motorcycle roadside assistance plan for dealing with mechanical problems beyond your capability and a cell phone to contact the plan or to call 911 for a medical emergency make good sense for riding in “civilized” areas. However, a satellite phone and a service like MedJet Assist might make a life-saving difference when riding globally and suffering from a serious disease or trauma. First aid considerations in such situations differ significantly from those most commonly encountered by the average rider, and include provisions for severe bleeding, fractures, and shock care.

**DURATION.** The anticipated length of your ride also impacts the composition and quantity of supplies needed. The potential first aid needs during a 1-2 day ride will be different than those needed for a trip of 1 to 2 weeks (or months).

**DISABILITY.** What, if any, physical disabilities do you have that might lead to specific complications if things should “go bump in the night”? What prescription medications are needed? Do you have any allergies (*e.g.*, bee stings) that might require an EpiPen®? How will you keep your medications, such as epinephrine or insulin auto-injectors, at the appropriate storage temperature while riding, especially in particularly hot or cold weather? Also, remember to have all prescriptions professionally labeled with your name and your doctor’s name. This is especially important when crossing international borders and/or when carrying controlled substance medications.

**DISPLACEMENT.** How much room on the bike can you dedicate to carrying first aid supplies? Our bikes of choice vary significantly in their discretionary capacity (Gold Wing vs. KLR, for instance).

**DIDACTICS.** What kind of first aid training have you received? Someone with little to no training would probably not

be able to appreciate or utilize the types of supplies favored by an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) or First Responder.

Fortunately, the most common maladies suffered by motorcycle riders are not life-threatening, though some could become significant without proper treatment. Hence, appropriate first aid supplies and planning are important. In the interest of reinventing as few wheels as possible (taking advantage of the collective experience of the long-distance riding community), an informal survey was distributed to a group of subscribers on the LDRider list to explore their approach to meeting perceived first aid needs on the road. While some riders gave little thought to this topic or took a distinctly minimalist view (“gloves, glasses, adhesive tape, and a couple of 4x4 bandages”), others went to great lengths to design and assemble comprehensive first aid kits to meet their anticipated needs. Some, like Eldon Cannon, even combined elements of personal first aid kits, “survival kits,” and “rescue kits.” While there is definitely overlap between these 3 types of kits, they do have distinct functions, based upon your focus and the Five D’s.

As one might expect, there was general consensus among the group and in relevant literature on the most common medical problems related to motorcycle riding. Sun exposure, dehydration, issues related to heat and cold, insect stings, musculoskeletal aches and pains, skin irritation, blisters, burns, bruises, lacerations, and abrasions were commonly mentioned. Those who are also bicyclists should recognize this list as well. Several respondents included gastrointestinal upsets — especially diarrhea — as an additional concern and Immodium AD® was the preferred remedy. In addition to the basic supplies to deal with the list of issues above, one obviously should include any medications needed for personal reasons — prescriptions, allergies, etc.

Another factor that will influence your decisions about first aid supplies is whether you are packing for yourself only, or you expect to assist other riders who may need help. Even those of us with advanced medical training and trauma experience will not be able to do much at a remote accident scene beyond controlling bleeding, trying to keep the airway open and keeping the injured person sheltered and still while waiting for an ambulance or evacuation. These are things that every rider can learn to do. Take a first aid course — most communities offer basic first aid classes — and an accident scene management class. You can also search the Internet to find a convenient one offered by a commercial company, such as Accident Scene Management, Inc. ([www.accidentscene.org](http://www.accidentscene.org)).

Once you decide to carry a first aid kit, the question is whether to purchase a commercially prepared one, or to assemble one yourself. As always, the answer is — it depends. »

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**BASIC KITS (1ST TIER).** The most basic kit should cover the most basic problems likely to be encountered on a motorcycle. Many riders may be comfortable with an inexpensive kit consisting of a quart-sized Ziploc® bag into which they place a selection of band-aids, some gauze squares, a pair or two of latex or non-latex gloves, a 2-3 inch Ace wrap, a roll of adhesive tape, some antibiotic cream, and a few aspirin, Tylenol® or Advil®.

For short rides in populated areas this basic kit would probably be sufficient, and chances are that most first aid kits will never be needed anyway. Other riders will decide that the convenience, design, and availability of ready “re-supply” commercial kits are worth the extra expense. There appears to be an almost unlimited number of choices, making it impossible to review them all. There are also some kits carried by vendors of motorcycle gear that could fall into this category. The Adventure Medical Kit (AMK) Adventure First Aid 1.0, the AMK Ultralight/Watertight .5 and the Aerostich Commuter are examples of simple commercial kits that would serve the same purpose as the “home made kit” while adding several additional components in neatly packed bags.

**INTERMEDIATE KITS (2ND TIER).** If you prefer more functionality, the AMK Ultralight/Watertight .9, the AMK Mountain Series Day Tripper, the Aerostich Sport, and the BMW Motorrad First Aid Roadcare Kit would be commercial considerations. These kits typically have the same supplies as the Basic Kits (1st Tier) kits, but some add things like irrigation syringes, tincture of benzoin (applied to skin to make bandages stick better), Imodium AD® to control diarrhea, and a more complete first aid booklet. Aerostich’s Touring First Aid Kit and the REI Backpacker Plus Extended Kit also fit in this category, with the latter claiming to be able to meet the basic needs of up to 6 people for 8 days while traveling. While none of these kits will likely be the perfect fit for a particular rider, they can all be customized by adding “missing” ingredients. For instance — a sturdy pair of EMT shears suitable for cutting thick clothing and dressings should be added if not included. Some extra sterile gauze dressings, extra gloves and a few triangular bandages (to make an arm sling or to wrap around a head wound) would be helpful. And while it won’t fit into the kit, a bottle of filtered water can be useful for irrigating wounds and flushing debris from eyes.



*Homemade kit*



*REI Backpacker Plus Extended Kit*

*Adventure Medical Kit 1.0*



*AeroCommuter*



*BMW Motorrad First Aid Roadcare Kit*



**ADVANCED KITS (3RD TIER).** At the top end of the AMK kits — both in functionality and price (MSRP of \$320) — is the Professional Series Expedition kit, designed with “enough components to care for a large group for an extended period of time.” It includes oral rehydration salts, water disinfectant tablets, a SAM® splint, etc. While our globetrotting colleagues might find this useful, I doubt most of us will ever need such a kit. For those who may venture away from civilization and ready access to professional care for a shorter period of time, AMK offers the Mountain Series Fundamentals kit (\$105) or the Professional Series Ultralight Pro (\$120). Both have a CPR face shield, a SAM® splint to stabilize fractures, the manual “A Comprehensive Guide to Wilderness & Travel Medicine” by E. A. Weiss, and supplies said to be capable of supporting 1-8 people for 1-14 days (some variation between the two kits). The “Ultralight Pro” also has a CPR pocket mask and an emergency reflective blanket, which would be useful to protect a victim from rain or cold. Adding something like AMK’s Dental Medic would allow treating basic dental problems that could be quite painful. And for true back country trips, where significant bleeding might be a problem, a pack or two of QuikClot® might be a lifesaver.



The American Red Cross is also a source for First Aid kits, informative First Aid instructional guides, DVDs, and a variety of emergency preparedness supplies ([www.redcrossstore.org](http://www.redcrossstore.org)). There are a host of other sites on the Internet that deal with similar topics. For instance, [Micapeak.com](http://Micapeak.com) provides a very comprehensive list of supplies to consider for a motorcycle first aid kit. The entire list may be a bit overwhelming, and contains items that many riders will not choose to include, but it serves as a good “tickler” as you choose what to carry on your bike. Another helpful

**Professional Series Expedition kit (left) and AMK Professional Series Ultralight Pro (below).**



site is [jrtubbtheride.blogspot.com](http://jrtubbtheride.blogspot.com), which contains John Tubb’s detailed approach for assembling his two kits — one for his pocket and one for his bike.

Our survey of LDRider list members revealed that many long-distance motorcyclists learned to be resourceful during their travels and some of the items that you already have on your bike could serve double duty. Examples from Randy Owens include using the bike cover as an emergency shelter or survival “blanket” and using tire irons and electrical or duct tape as splints. Others shared experiences using a shirt for bandage material and using a bungee cord or luggage strap as a tourniquet.

Other helpful tips include:

- protecting ourselves by using latex (or non-latex) gloves and glasses (or sunglasses) if there is a danger of exposure to body fluids (Roger Van Santen and Jeff Fisher, an ER nurse).
- carry Benadryl® (“diphen” in some of the kits) if a rider has a significant reaction to stings (Bob Lilley).
- add Band Aid® Activ Flex™ bandages — to stabilize an injured or lacerated body part (Steve Jones).
- more than a few respondents mentioned the practicality of sanitary napkins for pressure bandaging severe bleeding wounds.
- and inspect first aid kits at the beginning of every riding season, but more often if stored in harsh environments, since medications can expire and adhesives can dry out (Dane McKittrick, Fran Kokes and many, many others).

I hope that you will never need a first aid kit while riding, but “being prepared” is more than just the Scout’s motto. Using his BMW first aid kit, IBA President Michael Kneebone once carefully picked out the gravel and sterilized the road rash suffered by a visiting vice president from BMW Motorrad. Can you imagine the brown points the IBA got that day since Mike was the only rider on a press ride prepared for an crash? The preceding information should get you off to a good start as you decide what to carry on your bike. Ride safe!

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**LEARN MORE ABOUT** instructional opportunities for First Aid, CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and AED (automated external defibrillator) training through the American Red Cross ([www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)). Many community organizations and employers host American Red Cross courses. Ask around!

In addition to reviewing your “on road” emergency preparations, consider how to respond to other disasters that might strike your community or home. Learn more about taking preparedness actions now that will help you deal with unexpected events from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ([emergency.cdc.gov/preparedness/](http://emergency.cdc.gov/preparedness/)).—Jim Weaver