Survival Basics: Suturing A Wound In The Wild

Even if you're fully knowledgeable in regard to survival basics, including the fine art of suturing a wound, the cold truth is this: regardless of how skilled one may be in this art, if you don't have the proper gear, you won't be able to do it.

Logistics

What do I mean with proper gear? Well, suturing supplies, of course.

At a bare minimum, we're talking about a suturing kit, stuff you won't be capable of DIY-ing on the fly, hence you should never leave home without a first aid kit in your bag. So, everything else aside, if you're going to save your friend's life, you'll require a needle driver (an object required to hold the needle as you're pushing it through the tissue), tissue forceps (you'll need that thing to work the tissue around as you're doing the suturing process), scissors (you'll have to cut out excess thread), and, very important, a sterile needle and thread. Sterilization is very important when it comes to putting foreign objects inside one's body.



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You can buy sterilized threads and suture at survival stores or online, or, worst case scenario, you can sterilize a regular thread and needle and whatever you require by boiling them for at least 45 minutes.

Now, with the logistics taken care of, let's concentrate on the topic at large:

How to Suture a Wound in the Wild

To begin with, suppose you're outdoors hiking and having fun and what not with your friends, somewhere as far away from civilization as possible. Life's good, everything looks awesome, the beauty of nature is breathtaking and everything's nice and dandy. Quiet. Pristine. Perfect.

Out of nowhere, reality strikes back with a vengeance: as one of your friends is splitting wood to make a fire, somehow he manages to put the maul through his leg, ending up with a particularly nasty wound, considering the circumstances, i.e. 300 miles away from the nearest hospital, in the middle of nowhere, you know the drill, you've seen it in B category movies.

So, you rush to the scene of the crime, admire the large and deep wound, then you congratulate your buddy for ruining your vacation. But, you'll have to take care of him, right? Fortunately, he did not manage to cut a major artery, so a life-threatening hemorrhage is out of the picture. However, even if the bleeding has been stopped for now, you'll still have to mitigate the problem of a huge gaping wound staring at you from your buddy's leg.

The point being, that open wound will never heal by itself, hence you'll have to close it up, thus reducing the probability of getting infected and helping it to start healing nice and proper. A butterfly bandage won't work, as such device is not capable of keeping the wound tight. The

writing on the wall is clear: your friend needs stitches. The good news is that you have a suturing kit available, and you also have some knowledge regarding DIY wound suturing. How nice is that?

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So, if you don't know how to suture a wound just yet, keep reading: after all, what's up with suturing a wound? Suturing is just a fancy word for stitches in medical lingo, i.e. the process of using sterilized thread and needle in order to sew together a nasty wound, allowing the tissue to heal properly and to keep infection away in the process. Stitches are required when a wound is gaping and deep, such is the case with self-inflicted cuts while chopping wood. Note to self: never send a boy to do a man's job, especially in the wild.

Moving along with the suturing story, if you're dealing with a nasty cut and you can see fat in there, it's pretty clear that wound will require suturing. Suturing makes sure all the layers of the tissue are kept close together, as any gap in that area would make for the perfect place for an infection to pop-up. When it comes to deep/wide wounds, a regular bandage would only keep the top-part of the tissue together, while the stuff beneath will still be separated. And that's a no-no procedure.

Now, remember that you should perform DIY suturing only in real emergencies. The thing about stitches is that they require an insane amount of practice for getting it right. An incorrectly sutured wound may become infected, and that's a life-threatening condition in some cases, not to mention that you might leave a hideous scar on your buddy's leg due to an improperly healed wound due to a faulty suturing technique.

A suture performed by a trained medic in an emergency room (a controlled/sterile environment) is pretty much routine,

medicine 101. DIY-ing this in the wild is quite another story, not to mention you'll probably have to perform this procedure without having your buddy injected with a numbing agent, hence the operation will be extremely painful for the victim.

You'll Have to Practice First.

There's no way around that. And I bet you're not ready to do it on your kids. But rest assured, there are a few ways around this problem, and I don't mean your neighbor's kids either. So, how can you practice putting stitches on a wound sans a wound?

Well, that's an easy one: use a pig belly instead. A lot of medics learned how to suture wounds back in the day by practicing on a flap of pig belly. This is not a new concept. Pigs are pretty similar to humans genetically speaking, and that includes the skin and the fat underneath. The only caveat is that pig skin is thicker than human skin.

If you want something more human-like, I've heard that a chicken breast with the skin left on is very much alike human skin. If you're already disgusted by these ideas, you can always buy yourself a suture pad. Those bad boys are available on Amazon, and they come with pre-cut wounds on their flesh-like latex material. You can use these suture pads multiple times (unlike pig bellies), and they're really affordable (around 20 bucks).

Now, It's Practice Time.

That about sums it up for today. I hope you enjoyed reading the article. If you have questions or comments, don't hesitate to use the dedicated section below. Good luck, have fun folks!

