

Snake bites

Australia is home to the most dangerous snakes in the world, so taking a few precautions makes sense, especially in the bush. Not all snake bites are poisonous, but it is safer to treat any bite as potentially dangerous.

Preventing snake bite

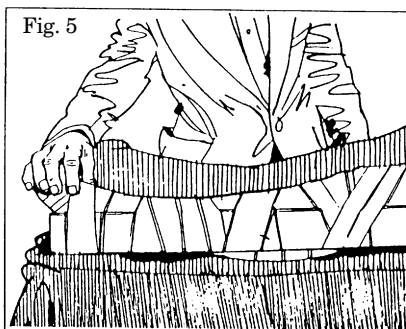
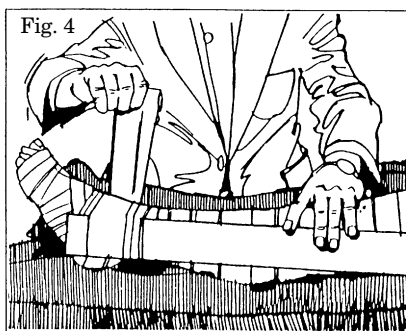
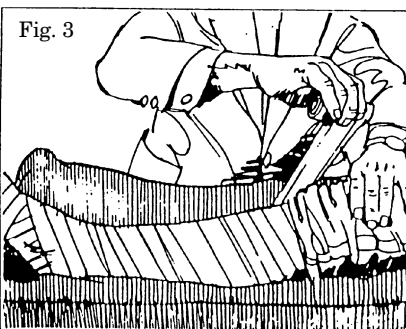
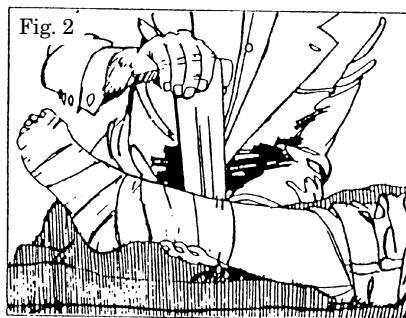
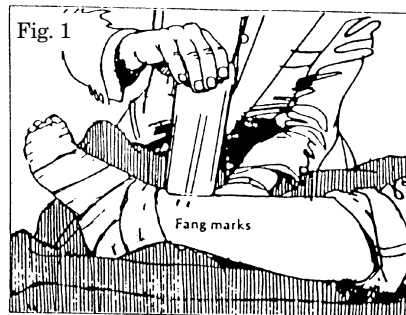
- Many snake bites in Australia are at the ankle or below. So, wear footwear, preferably ankle length, and thick socks and/or long trousers.
- If collecting wood, wear gloves.
- Never put your hand under anything (wood, rocks, etc.), without turning it over with your foot first.
- If a log is in your path, step on to it, not straight over it.
- Use a torch at night if walking in the bush.
- Avoid long grass.

Symptoms

- There may be no symptoms at first, but with time, depending on the type of snake, some of the following may occur: nausea, vomiting, sweating, abdominal pain, headache, diarrhoea, drowsiness, pains in the chest, double vision.

What to do if you or someone else is bitten by a snake

- Do not panic.
- Apply a pressure bandage immediately; it should be as tight as you would apply to a sprained ankle.
- Immobilise the limb with a splint.
- Do not elevate the limb.
- Keep the victim still, as physical activity spreads the venom more quickly. If walking is necessary, walk as slowly as possible.
- Try to get medical help immediately (at least within eight hours).
- If possible, try to get an accurate description of the snake.



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Figs. 1-5: Bandage over the bite and wind the bandage up the limb towards the trunk, keeping firm pressure. Bind a splint firmly to as much of the leg as possible.

For bites on the hand or forearm follow the same procedure, binding towards the elbow. Use splint and also a sling.

If the victim is unconscious and breathing, place in the coma position (lying on the side so the tongue does not block the air passage, and vomit or other secretions drain away). Seek urgent medical attention. If not breathing, use resuscitation techniques.*

Applying a pressure bandage

The venom of a snake bite works towards the trunk of the body through small lymph vessels which are just under the skin. These vessels are easily compressed with a pressure bandage, which slows the movement of the poison. Together with immobilisation by a splint, venom movement can be delayed for long periods.

Torn up clothing or towels (panty hose is satisfactory) can be used to make a bandage, and a rolled up newspaper a splint. Bandage straight over the bite and wind the bandage up the limb towards the trunk, keeping a firm pressure. See illustrations.

What not to do

- **DO NOT** try to chase or catch the snake.
- **DO NOT** wash the bitten area to remove any venom as the hospital laboratory might need to take a swab to identify the snake.
- **DO NOT** bleed the site of the bite, a common practice in the past, but of no use.
- **DO NOT** use a tourniquet or apply a bandage so tightly it cuts off blood flow.

** To learn how to use mouth to mouth resuscitation or CPR (cardio pulmonary resuscitation) techniques correctly, contact St John Ambulance Service.*