



**QUICK GUIDE ON**

# **HOW TO AVOID DROWNING**

Dear Friend,

Drowning is a terrible way to go, taking 3,536 innocent US lives each year, with one in 5 being children. Meaning 10 souls lost, every single day, and even if you're lucky enough to survive, brain damage could leave you in a vegetative state.

Because drowning chokes and kills over 372,000 people each year, being the world's 3<sup>rd</sup> biggest cause of unintended death. That's 7% of all injury-related deaths due to something most take for granted, even if they don't live near water.

Because many of those deaths are caused by acts of nature. Everything from stormy hurricanes to tsunamis, from small boat accidents to flashfloods. Nonetheless, you *can* help, reduce your risk, and save others with just a little knowhow...

P.S.: Remember that sharing is caring, so share this info with any friends that might benefit from this experience!

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*Survivopedia.com*

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# How to Avoid Drowning

Each year, too many people drown in the United States just because they don't understand the dangers of water. People have drowned in as little as 1 inch of water when they were knocked unconscious and landed face down in a mud puddle. However, most drownings occur in freshwater lakes, rivers, streams, backyard swimming pools, or at the beach.

When someone is drowning, there may be very few visual or auditory cues. Because even the strongest swimmer can get into trouble, do not hesitate to add lifeguard skills and classes to your list of survival knowledge to acquire.

Learning all you can about how to recognize and avoid drowning is a first step to building a water survival plan that should include all of the elements that you will find below.

# Signs and Symptoms of Drowning

When a person begins to drown, a very small amount of water enters the lungs. This tiny amount triggers a spasm in the trachea muscles, which then causes the throat to close. Once the airway seals up, there is no way for air or water to get through. This is why people who are drowning usually are unable to scream for help. Before the person dies, they will usually lose consciousness, the muscles relax, and more water will enter the lungs.

The following are signs and symptoms of drowning and near drowning:

- Head low in the water with mouth at water level.
- Head tilted back with mouth open.
- Eyes glassy, empty, and unfocused.
- Eyes open with fear evident on the face.
- Hyperventilating or gasping for air.
- Trying to swim in a particular direction but not making headway.
- Trying to roll over on their back to float.
- No motion – the victim may be unable to move their arms or legs.

I firmly believe that if you do not know how to swim you should stay out of all bodies of water. Do not go swimming unless you are with friends or family members that will watch for signs of drowning.

Even the most experienced swimmer can get a cramp or have some other problem that leads to water entering the lungs. There are many groups that can teach you to swim. Just a few include the American Red Cross, the YMCA, your local high school if they have swimming teams, or your city or county recreation departments.

# How to Keep from Drowning While Swimming in Lakes, Rivers, Streams, or in the Ocean

As an Eagle Scout, I have a strong belief in the Boy Scout Safe Swim Defense Plan:

- There should always be a lifeguard on duty and a lookout that can watch the whole swimming area and all swimmers at all times.
- All individuals should be in good physical shape. Anyone with a health condition that does not allow swimming should be kept out of the water.
- Only swim in safe areas. The bottom of the swimming area should be free of all dangerous deep holes, rocks, or other underwater snags.
- The swimming area should be marked for the three skill levels of swimmers. They are non-swimmers, beginners, and swimmers.
- Use of a buddy plan with swimmers of equal ability to watch out for each other.
- There must be good discipline in the swimming area.
- Never swim in an area that is beyond your swimming ability.
- Always have either tossable rescue equipment such as a safety ring on a rope or a flotation device like an air mattress readily available when swimming.

If you are going to rescue somebody in a body of water, you must be sure that you do not become a victim yourself by being dragged under by a panicking individual in the water. If the person in distress is relatively close to you, your first option is to try to reach for him with your arm, a pole, or a long stick.

If this individual is farther out than you can reach, try throwing a rope with a safety ring attached to it. If this does not work, then you may want to go out to them with a row boat or other watercraft. As a last resort you will have to go into the water after them.



If you must swim after the individual, use a lifeline that is tied in a loop around your chest. In the event that the individual starts to panic and tries to use you as a flotation device, the rope-handling crew on the edge of the water can pull you both back to safety.

If you are swimming to the rescue and you are not using a lifeline or rescue buoy, approach the victim so that he cannot reach out and grab you. If he tries it in his panicked mental state, you will have to push away from him, block him, or go under water fast. These actions will cause the victim to let go so that you can try to come in for your rescue a second time.

## **How to Keep from Drowning in Boating Accidents in Rapids or Deep Water**

If you are shooting the rapids in either a canoe or kayak, here are some hard and fast rules:

- Always wear a life vest. A life vest will keep your head up and floating on top of the water.
- Always wear a safety helmet. Many deaths happen because canoers and kayakers are thrown into the rapids, hit their heads, and drown because they were unconscious.
- Never run rapids that are beyond your training and skill level. Know your limitations and do not be lead into a false belief that you can do it. If you have a bad feeling about the river, don't run the rapids. Peer pressure can get you drowned.
- For safety, always kayak in a group and not alone. If anything goes wrong, there is safety in numbers.
- Regularly practice how to get your kayak or canoe upright again and how to get back into it. The more you practice, the easier it gets and the less chance you will have to panic and drown.
- Know how to free-float in rapids when separated from your kayak or canoe. Start by

laying on your back with your feet and legs pointed downstream and use your arms to steer. When your legs are in this position, it is easier to protect your head and chest from rocks and other obstacles in the water. Keep doing this until you are out of the rapids and into slower moving water.

## How to Avoid Drowning in Deep Water

If you're out in deep water and you are using a boat under 18 feet long, be aware of the number of people in the boat with you. An overcrowded boat can easily be swamped by the waves, or riders can be thrown overboard. Always carries enough life jackets for everyone on board and have flotation devices such as floating seat cushions, plastic coolers, and ropes with a floating ring on hand.

If you or another boater gets thrown overboard, the following techniques will keep you from drowning until you are rescued.

- Float on your back - By floating on your back it is possible to conserve a lot of energy. You will have the ability to last longer than someone that is trying to stay afloat by swimming.
- Tread Water - Treading water uses more energy than floating on your back but your head is out of the water, and you have a good view of what's going on around you.

## How to Use Clothes to Avoid Drowning

*Use Your Shirt to Make an Air Bubble* - If you fall into the water and your shirt is tucked into your pants, you can use your shirt to make an air bubble to float on. Use the following steps:

- Hold your breath and duck down into the water. Blow air into the shirt.
- Hold the shirt tightly at the collar to keep the air bubble in the shirt.
- Repeat blowing air into the shirt and holding the collar for as long as needed to keep you afloat.

*Use your Pants* - It is possible to make an air floating device by using your jeans or other long-legged pants. This air float will last longer and can be used to keep up to four people floating for a good length of time.

- The first thing to do is to take off your shoes. This is done by floating face down on the surface with your feet under you. Draw a breath of air and bend over under water and remove the shoes one at a time.
- To remove your pants, float in a face down position and undo the belt first. Then unzip the pants. Finally remove one pant leg at a time. Note: Do not forget to breath regularly by coming up to the surface.
- Once the pants are off your body, blow air into the side pockets to keep the pants afloat.
- While treading water, put a half knot on each pant leg. When this is done, turn the pants inside out, and then zip up the zipper.
- To get air into the pants, tread water, kicking hard with your feet. Open up the pants, then quickly move them forward catching air in the legs as you come back down into the water. Repeat if necessary to better fill up the legs with air.
- If you want to add more air without raising the float, cup your hand and pull it quickly under water to release an air bubble into the pant float.

### *How to Keep Four People Afloat with One Pair of Pants*

- To do this form a circle with one person at 12, 3, 6, and the 9 o'clock positions. The swimmers at the 12 and 6 o'clock position will hold on to the pants at the belt area to

keep the air in the pants.

- The other two swimmers will put one hand on each of the other swimmers to form a circle.
- Continue doing this until rescued.

## How Not to Drown When Your Boat Gets Swamped

With today's modern small boat design, it is extremely hard to sink your boat. Even if it is cut in half by a larger ship, many small boats today have flotation devices built inside of them to keep them afloat. The following is how to survive and not drown when your boat has been swamped or capsized, and is full of water.

- Always stay with the boat and do not attempt to swim to shore. Even a boat full of water has enough buoyancy to support you and several others.
- If the boat gets swamped near shore, the easiest way to survive is to hang on to the boat with one hand and swim with the other hand while kicking with both legs. The boat will keep you afloat. If you get tired, rest and hold on to the boat.
- If the boat gets swamped a good distance from shore, stay in the boat and use the oars. If you have lost the oars and cannot recover them, use your hands to hand paddle.
- If the boat has capsized, take a position near the middle of the boat. Grab the gunwale (side of the boat) and turn the boat upright again. When getting back into a swamped boat, be very careful not to flip the boat back over again. This can be done by having another person on the opposite side of the boat stabilize it while you are getting in.
- If the boat was overloaded when it was swamped, it may be impossible for everyone to get back in. To keep everyone safe, an equal number of people should get on each side of the boat and hang onto it. This will help stabilize the boat. To get back to shore, each person hanging onto the boat should paddle with their free hands while kicking their

legs.

- If anyone gets too weak or cold, let them get back into the boat without swamping it again.

## Using the Drown-Proofing Method to Stay Alive

Drown-proofing is a water survival technique that was invented by Fred Lanoue, a swimming coach at Georgia Institute of Technology from 1936 to 1964. It was his belief that everyone should be able to survive in the water, and he developed a simple technique that was easy to learn and did not depend on physical strength.

According to Lanoue, everyone has a small amount of buoyancy, but it is not enough to keep all of the head above water. An individual can float in an upright position, with their face submerged and only lifting the mouth and nose above the water when it is necessary to breathe. Using this method, it is possible to float indefinitely while only using a small amount of energy.

The first thing you'll likely wonder is how effective drown-proofing is. Anyone can learn to survive indefinitely in the water as soon as this technique is mastered. The average person can only swim a few laps of the pool, but with drown-proofing, the swimmer can take a break and rest until they are ready to continue swimming. Drown-proofing techniques are also useful to handicapped swimmers that might not be able to swim for a long period of time.

The following are the basic steps that you need to follow for drown-proofing. If you take a class on this skill, you can learn in just a few days.

### Using Only Your Arms

- Fill your lungs with a good breath of fresh air and float vertically with the back of your head just breaking the surface of the water. The water will support your body.

- Let your arms float slowly toward the surface with your elbows bent until your hands are in front of your shoulders.
- With a steady movement, push downwards and back with your hands until your mouth clears the water.
- Repeat this every 10 to 15 seconds.

## Using Your Arms and Legs

- When using the arms and leg method, use a scissors kick with your legs and press downward with your hands at the same time. The object of this motion is to use as little energy as possible to keep a balanced position.
- The trick is to get your head just far enough out of the water to get a breath. If you use too much energy to get your head above water, you will come too far out of the water. As you go back down you will sink too deep into the water.
- The goal is to achieve a gentle, easy action that uses very little energy. The less effort you expend, the better.

## Get the Breathing Right: It's Very Important

- When your head first emerges from the water, it should be tilted slightly forward so that the water falls away from your face.
- Open your mouth wide when you inhale so you get as much air as possible.
- In drown-proofing it is very important to consciously change the way you breathe. Keep your lungs full of air as much of the time as possible.
- When you take a breath exhale and inhale as quickly as possible through your mouth.

## How to Avoid Drowning In a Rip-Current

To begin, you must be able to recognize a rip current. It is best to stay out of them when you see them. From above the beach on a hill, rip-currents look like bands of choppy, darker-colored water. Sometimes you can see sea foam or other debris being carried out to sea through the breaks in the waves.

Rip currents are very dangerous currents that are located along the seashore in the surf. When the waves come in and head to the shore, they continue forward until they can go no further up onto the beach. As the water retreats back to the ocean it sets up currents known as rip-currents. These currents head back towards deep water and they will pull you along.

When a swimmer is dragged out into deeper water and realizes that they need to swim back toward shore, they must swim against a very strong outbound current that continues to pull them outward if they try to swim straight back.

### What to Do if You Are Caught in a Rip-current

- Do not panic. This must be the most important thing on your mind. In a panicking mindset, you will try to fight the current and exhaust yourself and die. You must stay calm at all costs. Staying calm will let your survival instincts kick in and show you how to survive.
- If you are a strong swimmer and are not exhausted, go with the current, but swim across it at a 45 degree angle. In most cases it will take you a bit further out, but it will also bring you back to the wave breaking area. From here it is easy to get back to shore because you're out of the rip-current.
- If you are a weak or exhausted swimmer, still move with the current and do not panic. Swim parallel to the beach until you reach the wave breaking area. From here you can either swim, walk, or call the lifeguard to get to shore.

- There is a new method for surviving rip-currents that has been developed by Dr. Jamie MacMahan and discussed in the Marine Geology magazine. Tread water to save your energy and float along with the currents. In about 3 to 5 minutes the rip-current will return you to the wave breaking zone and you can either swim or walk back to the water's edge. This system has been tested around the world with live swimmers and instrument packets.

## How Not to Drown in Flash Floods

Flash floods occur when an excess of water fills normally dry creek or river beds along with currently flowing creeks and rivers. This causes a rapid rise of water in a short amount of time. Normally there is little or no warning.

Flash floods are the most dangerous type of floods because they can combine the destructive power of a flood with incredible speed and unpredictability.

### Know Which Areas are at Risk from Flash Floods

- High population areas in large cities and towns where the ground is covered with highways, roads, parking lots, and driveways. There is little room for the water to be absorbed by the ground. The end result is that this runoff increases the threat of flash flooding as it enters the rain runoff system and moves on to populated areas downstream.
- In some cities and towns where storm drains are used to re-route creeks and streams. In heavy rains, these storm drains become overwhelmed and flood roads and underpasses.
- Along rivers that have a history of flash flooding. In these areas there are levees that have been built to control the water. In some cases, too much rain falls in a short time and the rivers overflow their banks.



- Mountains and steep hills produce rapid runoff. With the water running downhill, it is moving too quickly to be absorbed into the ground. This water ends up in the local creeks and streams causing them to overflow the creek and stream banks. This kind of flash flooding can turn a small creek into a raging river in a short amount of time.
- Low water crossing areas can be death traps. In normal conditions, these crossings are safe to use. In flash floods, the water will be too deep and they will become unsafe to use as a crossing.
- In recent burn off areas in the mountains, there is a strong risk of flash flooding because there is nothing to absorb the water or slow it down. The mixture of mud and ash will speed downward, causing a flash flood.
- In dry soil, very heavy rains can produce flash flooding. In the American West, most canyons, small streams, and dry arroyos look safe to travel in. When hit by flash flooding, they can turn into death traps that can suddenly fill up with water 10-20 feet deep with very little warning.

## What to Do if you are Walking or Hiking

- You must always check on the weather before departing on your hiking trip. Always check the weather in your primary hiking area. If you're hiking area goes through a flash flood area, even a sunny day can turn to disaster if rainfall is expected.
- While hiking or walking across dry river beds, listen for a rumbling noise coming from upstream. If you hear that sound, leave the river bed and go to higher ground immediately. What you are hearing is the debris just ahead of the flash flood water. If you do not get out of the riverbed in time, the debris and water will knock you down, bury you, and drown you.
- If you are hiking in a dry canyon and lightening is observed, it is time to leave and get to higher ground. A bad thunderstorm mile away in the mountains can cause a flash flood in your canyon. If it is a small, narrow canyon, it is possible to get hit with a wall of water

10-plus feet tall moving at a very fast clip. If you do not get to higher ground, it will drown you.

- Remember that it only takes about 2 inches of fast-moving water to knock you off your feet. Once down, it is almost impossible to get back on your feet. Once you are down, you will be at the mercy of the water and you will more than likely drown as a result.
- If you hear the flash flood coming and there is no high ground, get to the highest object you can manage such as trees, buildings, or anything else that is sturdy and will get you above the flood waters.

## Cars

A lot of people feel that they are safe in their cars and other vehicles during a flash flood. This is totally wrong and could lead to your death by drowning.

### **The best way not to get caught in a flash flood is to turn around.**

- Even though you think you are safe in your monster truck or larger car, this is far from the truth. It only takes 2 to 4 inches of water for a vehicle to lose traction in a flash flood. To totally float your car, it only takes 18 to 24 inches of water.
- Never go under bridges in a flash flood. The water in this area may actually be several feet deep, but only look inches deep.
- Don't go around "Road Closed" signs. These roads are closed for a reason; there may be a bridge out or dangerously high water levels.
- If your home and neighborhood are on high ground and dry, stay home where it is safe.

### **What to Do if You Are Stuck in a Car During a Flash Flood**

- Do not panic. Panicking will not help you. You must keep a clear, calm mind so that you can make the right decisions in order to survive.
- You must get out of the car and get to the roof or any other high spot on your vehicle.

- If you have power windows and power doors, there's a good chance they will not work. You will be trapped in the car unless you can break a window manually. I personally carry a small auto window breaking hammer in my glove box.
- Once the window is broken, climb through the opening to the roof. If there are other passengers in the car, put the first one on the roof to help others get onto the roof.
- Once everyone is out of the car and on the roof or highest spot on the vehicle, try to get the attention of individuals on the high ground. If your cell phone still works, call 911 for emergency assistance.
- When the emergency rescue group arrives, do everything they tell you to do because your life depends upon it.
- Your rescue may be made by boat or a helicopter. If you are afraid of heights, close your eyes and let the rescue workers do everything for you. If you panic, you may not only put the rescue worker's life and your life in danger, but both of you could be drowned in the flood waters.
- Once on shore, have the emergency service check over all passengers and yourself for injury or hypothermia.
- Stop worrying about the car or personal property that was left in the car. **Property can be replaced, but a human life cannot.**

## Homes

Many people that live in flood zones are caught off guard by flash floods. They must have a safety plan and the tools and supplies to remain safe. The following are things you should do when a flash flood hits you home:

- Turn off all electric power at the breaker box before the water hits it. Water and electricity do not mix and can cause death by electrocution or by drowning when knocked unconscious.
- If possible, leave your home before the flash flood hits. Leaving after the water is high is

very dangerous, and could cause you to get stranded in the water, or drowned.

- As the water level rises on the first floor, everyone including pets should move to the second floor.
- If your home doesn't have a second floor this means moving up to the attic.
- **Warning: Do not get trapped in the attic.** If the attic doesn't have windows or vents large enough for a human to escape through, the attic will become a death trap if the water fills up the house.
- To keep from drowning, keep an ax, sledge hammer, and other hand tools that can be used to cut holes in the roof to gain access to the outer roof.
- Keep life jackets and other flotation devices in the attic to keep you afloat if you are washed off the roof.
- If you are washed off the roof, try to swim and float to tall trees or other structures that can be climbed to get out of the water.
- When rescued by either boat or helicopter, do as instructed.

Knowing what to do around water is the key to your survival. Always be attentive and don't panic in dangerous situations.

Planning is the key to your survival. Without a water survival plan and regular practice, the end result could be the death of you or your friends or family.

# Resources

## Survivopedia Articles

[How To Cross Rivers Safely](#)

[Skills to Learn for First Aid in a World Gone Mad](#)

[Flood Preparedness DOs and DON'Ts](#)

[Here's How Easy It Is To Die In The Wilderness](#)

[5 Deadly Scenarios More Probable Than A Natural Disaster](#)

## Other Resources

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drowning>

<http://www.popularmechanics.com/adventure/outdoors/tips/a11919/how-to-escape-a-submerged-car-15510924/>

<http://tierneylab.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/01/new-way-to-beat-rip-currents-tread-water/>

<http://www.wikihow.com/Survive-a-Flood>

<http://www.treehugger.com/green-home/how-survive-flood.html>