

Langebaan Country Estate

SNAKE BITES

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Excerpt from
Noodhulp vir die Suid-Afrikaanse Huis, Werkplek en Buitelewe, Vlakke 1 - 3
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1. Interesting facts

- The puff adder is most responsible for snake bites
- Snakes are most active during spring and autumn, after the first rain of the season and at sunset
- Most people are bitten on the lower leg
- A snake that feels threatened, releases more venom than a non-threatened snake
- If no bite mark is visible, no venom has been injected. A so-called “dry bite” leaves only scratch marks
- The sooner a patient experiences symptoms of systemic reaction, the more life threatening the situation
- Children bitten by a snake have a higher mortality rate than adults
- A pregnant lady bitten by a snake should be treated as high priority. Snake bite usually leads to a miscarriage.
- When encountering a snake, freeze. If the snake does not move away, slowly reverse and do not make any sudden movements which will lead to an attack.
- Try to remember the appearance of the snake if you cannot correctly identify it.
- Snake bite can be divided into three groups, each with its own symptoms and treatment:

a. Tissue-toxic

Snakes: Adders, for example puff adder and horn adder

Signs and symptoms

- Reaction mostly localized
- Serious pain, that will become worse, appears within minutes
- The bite area swells up within minutes. Blisters may appear. Swelling can spread to entire limb and to rest of body
- Bleeding and tissue damage occur in affected area and blood can appear in bodily fluids
- Advanced signs: Gangrene, nausea and vomiting, shock, respiratory failure, death

b. Toxic to nervous system

Snakes: Cobra, mamba

The nervous system is affected, heart and respiratory muscles are paralysed and death will follow

Signs and symptoms

- Slight burning and swelling in bite area
- Systemic reaction - restlessness, desire to sleep, eyelids sagging, disturbed vision, enlarged pupils, generalized weakness, shivering and perspiration
- Paralysed facial muscles will lead to affected speech



- Pain in chest and difficult breathing. Some venom, such as Cape Cobra venom, will have a direct effect on the heart
- Unconsciousness, respiratory failure, convulsions, coma and death can follow within minutes

c. Venom affecting blood clotting

Snakes : Boom slang

Blood clotting mechanism is affected which leads to serious bleeding and haemorrhage

Signs and symptoms

- Localised reaction - initially only vague pain because of the bite. After some time bloody serum may seep from the wound
- Systemic reaction - Dizziness, nausea, vomiting, serious headache
- Advanced signs and symptoms - Blood in all bodily fluids and sub-cutaneous (blueish colour under skin). Within 24 - 48 hours after attack convulsions and death can follow.

2. Treatment for snake bites

- Secure the scene. Most snakes will still be within 10 meters of where the attack occurred.
 - Ensure that person has actually been bitten - look for gang marks and spit signs
 - Put pressure on the bite with your hand
 - Keep patient calm to slow heart rate
 - Transport to hospital immediately and give description of snake
 - Do not use a tourniquet
- a. If unsure about kind of snake, or if it was not an adder
- Remove patients shoes, but not the clothes
 - Keep patient calm and do not allow him to move - venom will spread quicker with movement
 - Transport to hospital immediately
 - Monitor breathing and circulation
 - Keep limb at same level as heart
 - Do not ever use a tourniquet
- b. If it was an adder (bite marks swells up immediately)
- Keep the limb elevated
 - Patient must lie down. Keep him calm and do not allow him to move
 - Transport to hospital immediately
- c. General notes
- Do not give any medication
 - Monitor circulation, especially in affected limb



- Monitor breathing
- Start rescue breathing and CPR as soon as is necessary

d. DO NOT

- Rub or massage affected area
- Cut the bite mark
- Apply ice or warm packs
- Apply anything to wound
- Give alcohol
- Give any medication

3. Venom in eyes

- Spitting cobras can spit up to three meters

a. Signs and symptoms

- Pain in eyes

b. Treatment

- Use running water to wash out eyes immediately. Lift eye lids to wash under lids. Patient should roll his eyes while it is washed out
- Wash out continuously for 10 - 15 minutes
- If no water is available, use any liquid, such as milk, beer, cold tea, urine, saliva
- After the eye has been rinsed for 15 minutes, transport to hospital

NO MEDICATION SHOULD BE GIVEN