



# First Aid For Snakebite Booklet



This booklet was produced  
for educational purposes  
and free distribution on  
behalf of the Upendo  
Conservation Area and  
Snake Community Action  
Network



Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs  
were provided courtesy of Stephen Spawls.  
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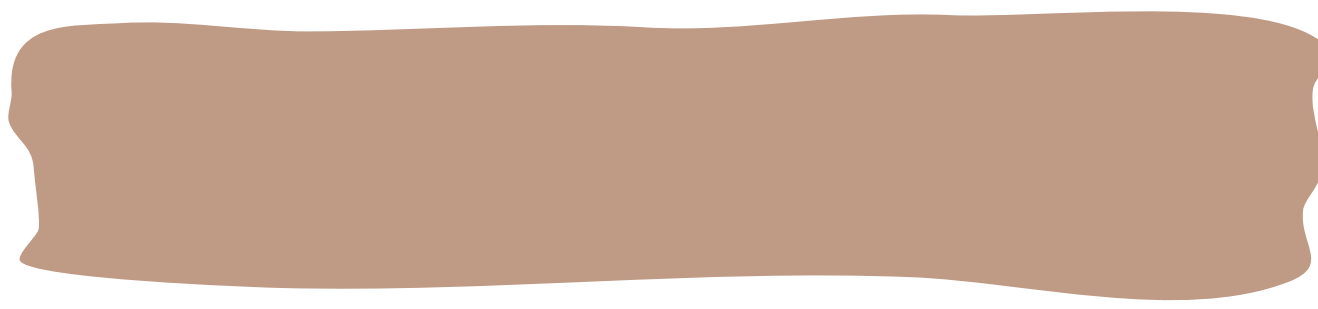
ANTIVENOM THERAPY

OTHER TREATMENTS

HOW LONG IN HOSPITAL?

WOUND CARE

SNAKE IDENTIFICATION



# Venom. Not Poison

There is a subtle difference between venom and poison. They are both toxins, meaning they do bad things to the bodies of living beings. **Venom** toxins have to be injected under the skin and into the underlying tissues. **Poisons** are toxins that must be breathed in (inhaled), eaten (ingested), or absorbed through the skin.

Venom is produced by snakes for two reasons: to capture prey and for defense against threats, like people stepping on them. To capture prey, venoms either have to do a lot of damage or act very quickly. They also need to start the digestion process. For defense, most venoms are either very painful or act quickly to immobilize the threat.

Snake venom is generally made up of a variety of toxins which have different properties. Although they often do different jobs, they work together to get the end result.

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# Types of Venom

**Cytotoxins** – cause severe damage to cells and tissues of the body. When these die, it is called **necrosis**, and the tissues turn black.

**Hemotoxins** – keep your blood from clotting, or make it clot too well. Generally cause excessive bleeding.

**Neurotoxins** – cause damage to nerves and the muscles they control, causing **paralysis** and **suffocation**.

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# Neurotoxic Symptoms

If you are bitten by a snake with neurotoxic venom, you will most likely feel some combination of the following symptoms:



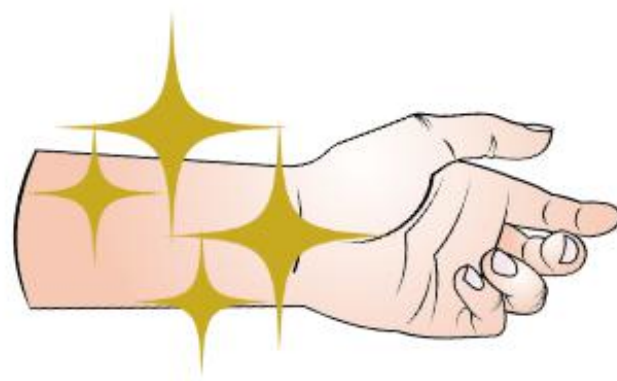
**TROUBLE  
BREATHING**



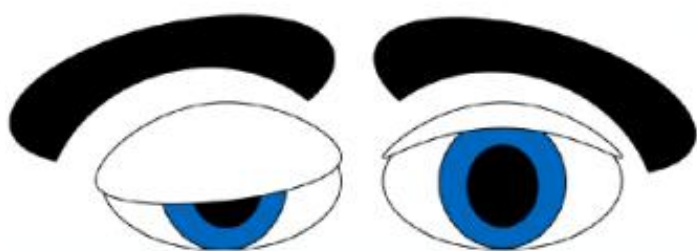
**DIZZY**



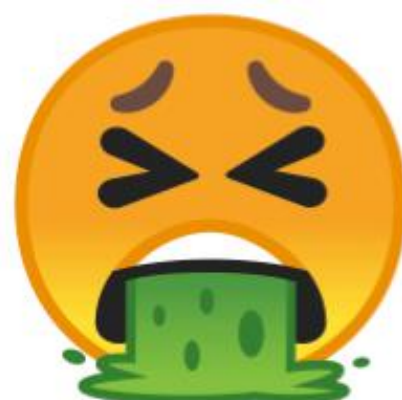
**MUSCLE  
TWITCHING**



**TINGLING  
SENSATIONS**



**DROOPY  
EYELIDS**



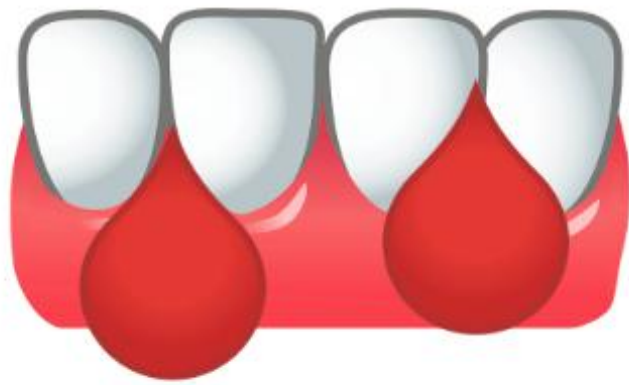
**NAUSEA  
VOMITING**

# Hemotoxic Symptoms

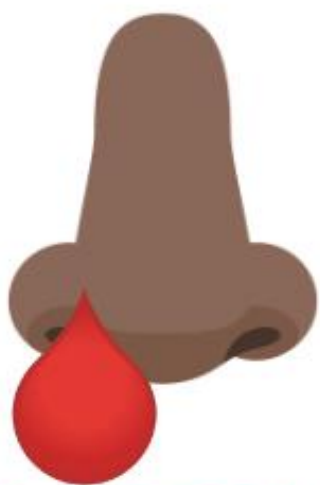
If you are bitten by a snake with hemotoxic venom, you will most likely feel some pain and a combination of the following symptoms. **However these symptoms may appear several hours to a day after the bite.**



**BLEEDING  
FROM  
BITE SITE**



**BLEEDING  
GUMS**



**BLEEDING  
NOSE**



**HEADACHE**



**NAUSEA**



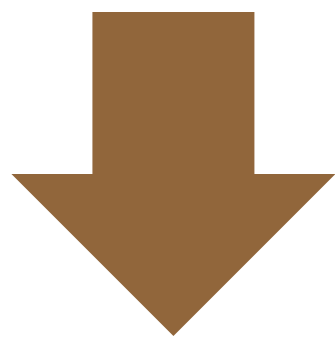
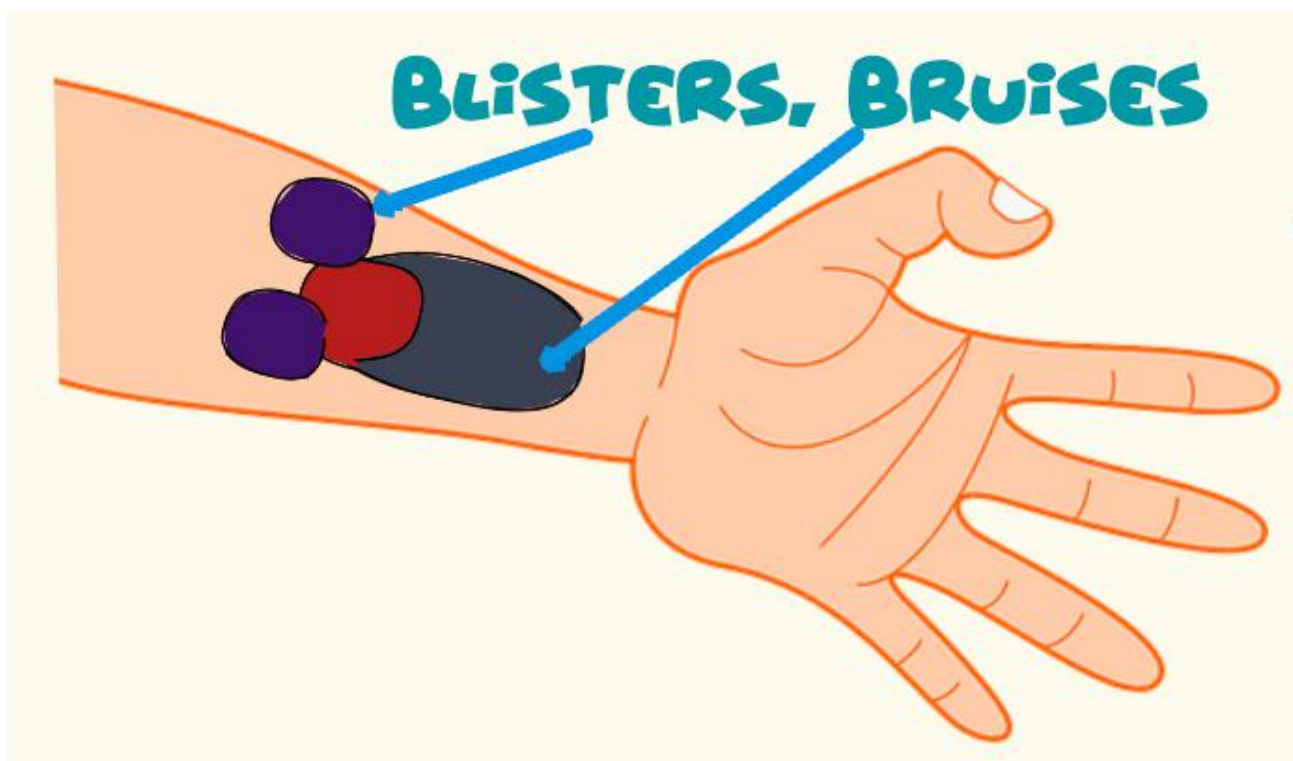
**SLEEPY**

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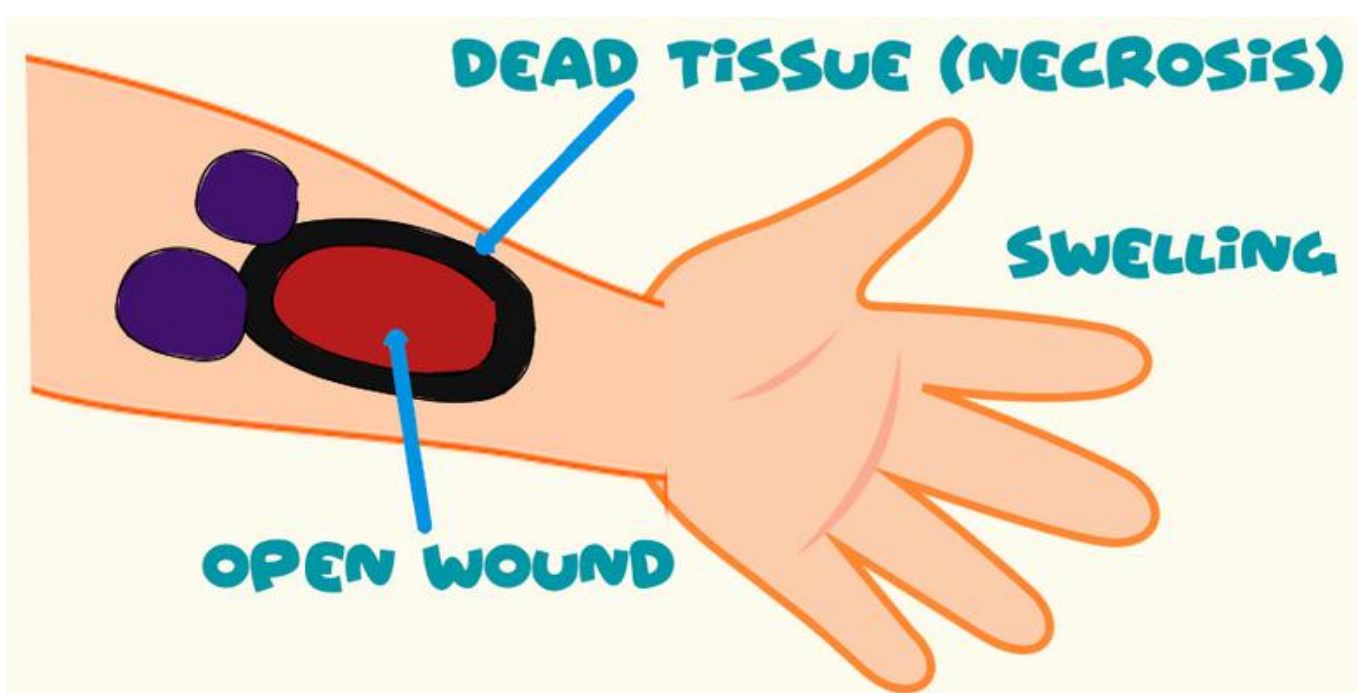


# Cytotoxic Symptoms

If you are bitten by a snake with cytotoxic venom, you will most likely feel pain and some combination of the following symptoms:



24-72 hours after bite

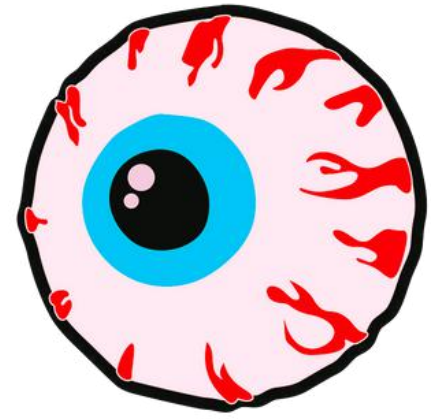


Other symptoms: low blood pressure, dizziness, fainting, pain

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# Cytotoxic Symptoms From Spit in the Eyes

If you are hit in the eyes by a spitting cobra with cytotoxic venom, you will most likely feel some combination of the following symptoms:



- **Painful and watery eyes**
- **Bloodshot eyes**
- **Uncontrollable blinking**
- **Twitching**
- **Swelling**
- **Sensitivity to light**
- **Loss of eyesight**

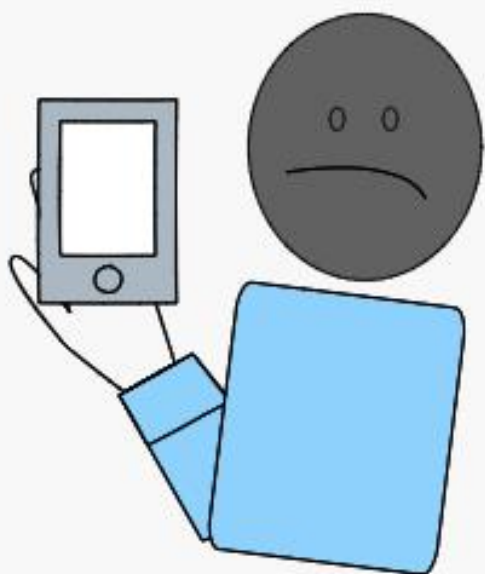
# What to do if you are bitten



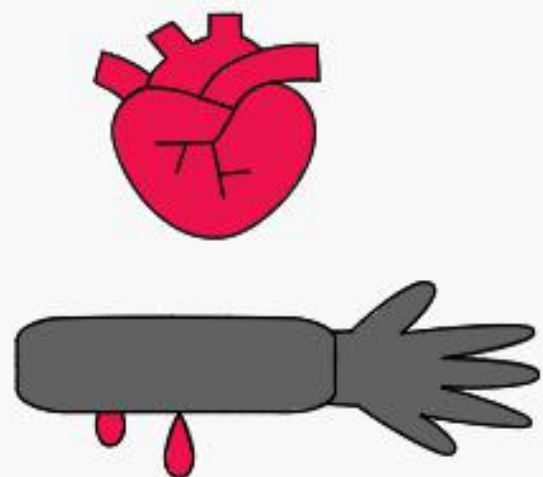
WALK away from the snake to a safe place



Stay as still as possible and remain calm to slow the spread of the venom



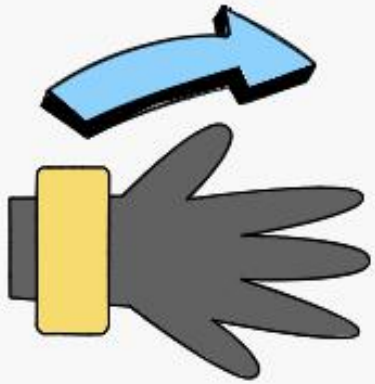
Call for help



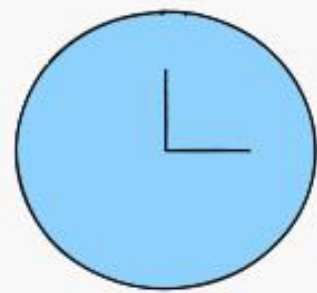
Keep the wound below the heart

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# What to do if you are bitten



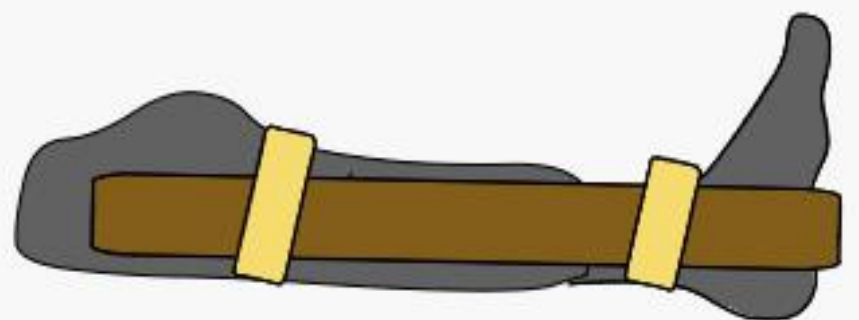
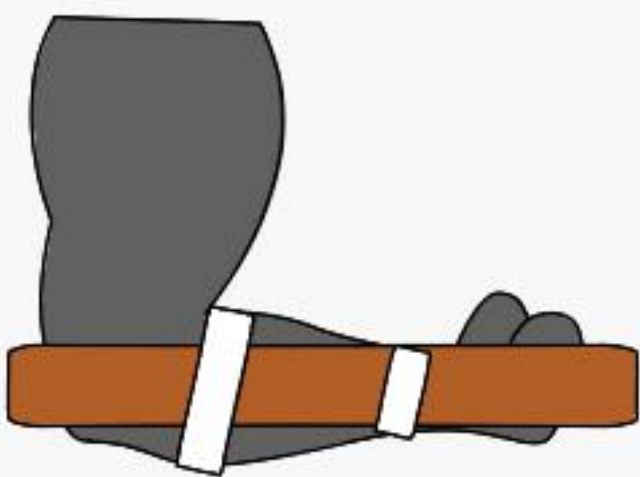
Remove jewelry and tight clothes



Record time of bite



Drink water to avoid dehydration



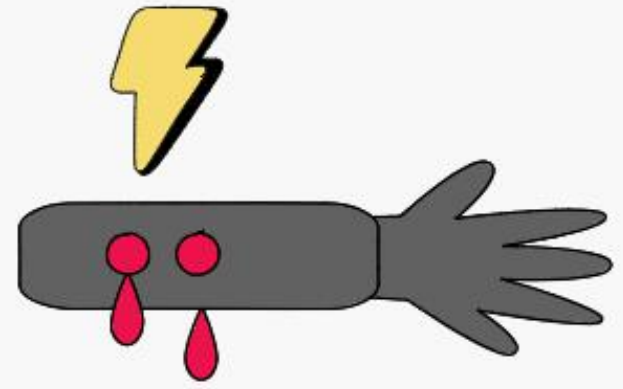
Immobilize the limb by making a splint

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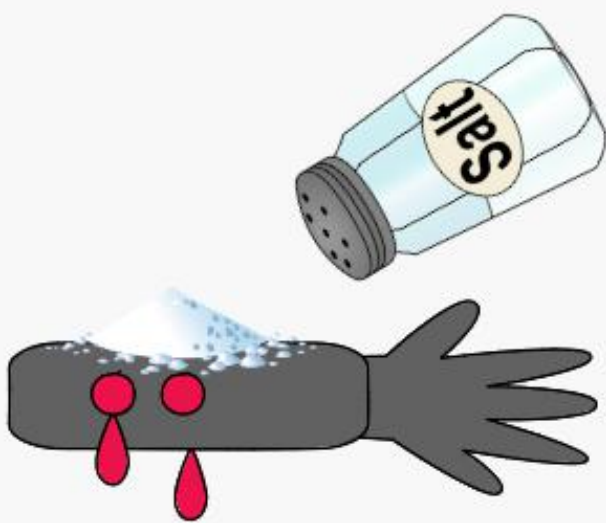
# What you should NOT do



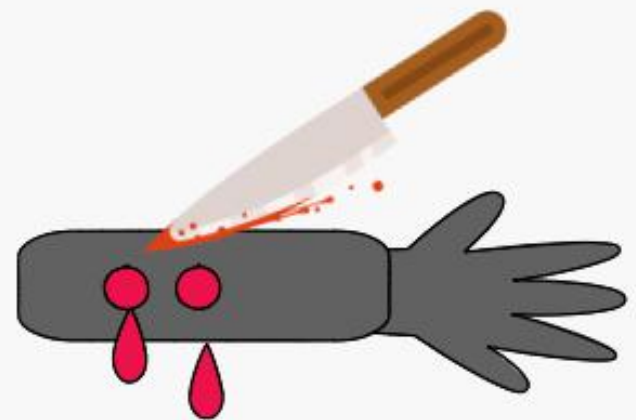
Do not burn or  
apply ice or cold



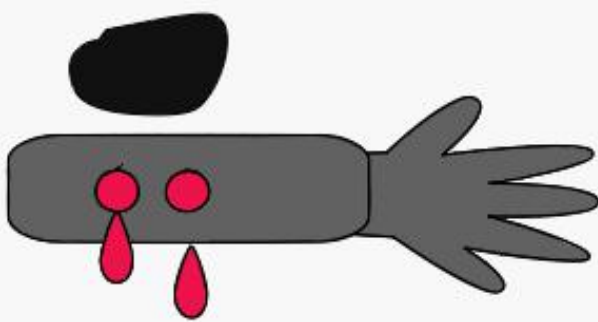
Do not shock



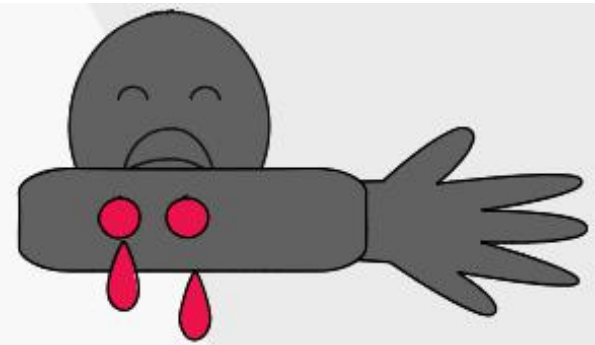
Do not add salt



Do not cut



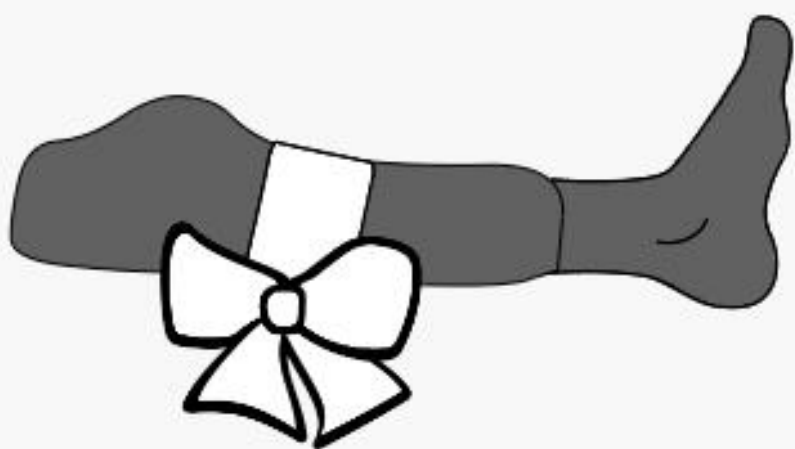
Do not use a black  
stone or charcoal



Do not try to  
suck out venom

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# What you should NOT do



No tourniquet



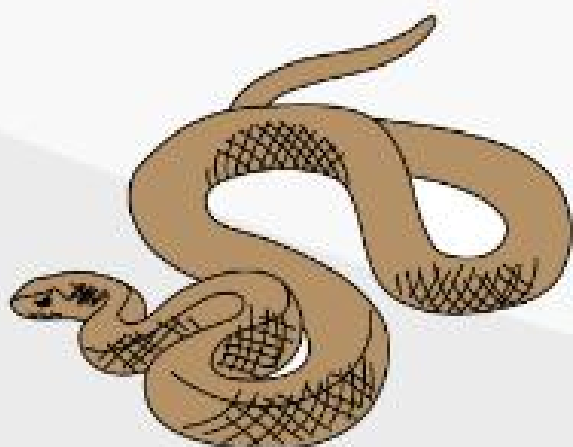
No traditional medicine



Do not eat  
paraffin wax



No alcohol or  
sedatives



Do not try to  
kill the snake

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# The Use Of Tourniquets Is Strongly Discouraged!

Tourniquets should absolutely not be used in the following situations:

- The type of snake is unknown
- The snake is known to possess cytotoxic or hemotoxic venom

There is a lot of swelling produced by these types of venoms and tourniquets will confine all of that cytotoxic venom in one area, leading to a lot of damage and possible loss of the limb.

For snakes with neurotoxic venom, swelling is less of a threat, but even so a tourniquet is not recommended. If you do use a tourniquet it must not be released until in the hospital with the doctor present, antivenom provided, and breathing apparatus ready.

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Tourniquets concentrate all the venom into one area where it can cause much more damage

If tourniquets are released without antivenom, a large amount of venom can spread rapidly into the body and cause serious damage.



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# What to do for venom in the eyes

***RINSE FOR 15-30 MINUTES***



Use urine as a last resort. Do not use human. milk as disease can be transmitted. Make sure to rinse corners of eyes and under lids.



Cover. your eyes with a cloth or dark sunglasses - they will be sensitive to light.



Get to a hospital as quickly as possible to receive additional treatment.

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# Should you go to a traditional healer?

For a venomous snakebite, there is no traditional remedy that will neutralize the effects of the venom once it is inside your body, and that includes concoctions, black stones, charcoal, paraffin, eggs, salt, poultices, and many other remedies. **They do not work for snakebite** although they may work for other ailments.

Many snake venoms kill or cause damage rapidly and if you go to a traditional healer, you are wasting valuable time and **RISKING YOUR LIFE. GO TO THE HOSPITAL!**



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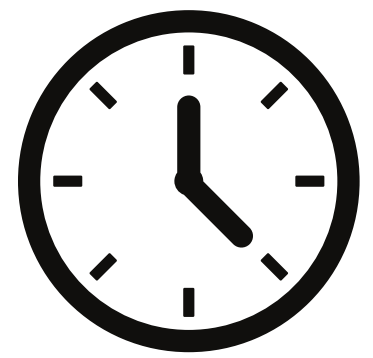
# When you get to the hospital ...

Tell the doctors. the following information:

How did the bite occur? Where were you? What were you doing?



What time did the bite occur?



Identity or photo of the snake or describe its features



Symptoms you are experiencing



# Antivenom Therapy

The doctors will look at the type of snake if known and the symptoms you are experiencing and will treat you accordingly. If indicated, the doctors may inject you with a medicine called **antivenom** which will counteract the effects of the venom inside your body. It will not be used if your symptoms do not indicate it is necessary.

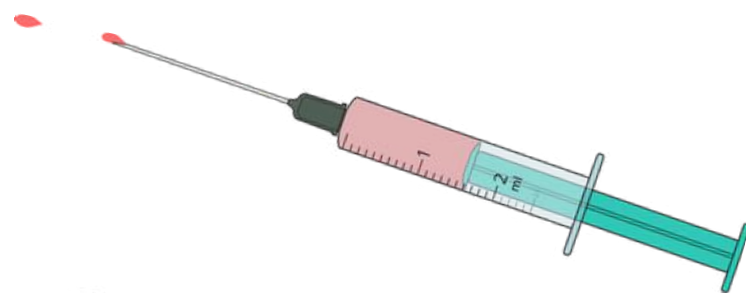
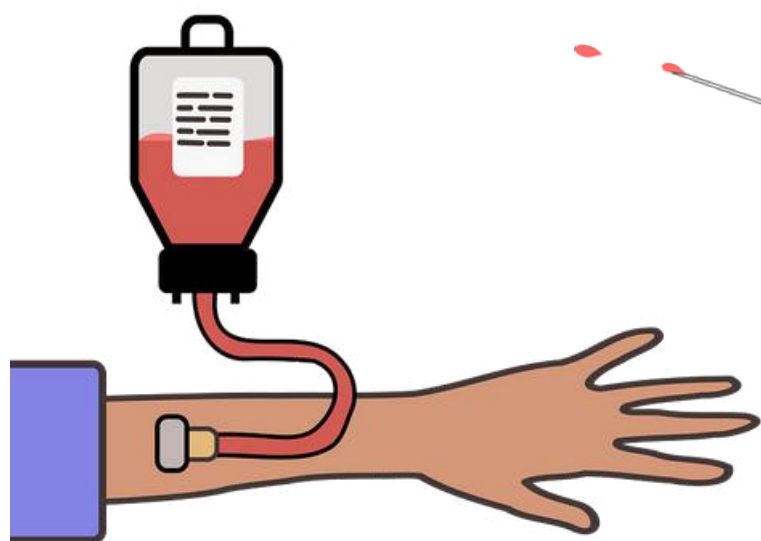


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# What other treatments might I receive?

Beyond antivenom therapy, common treatments for snakebite victims include:

- Antibiotics (bacteria in snake's mouth)
- Tetanus booster (if needed)
- Blood transfusions
- Breathing assistance or oxygen
- Fasciotomy (relieves pressure from swelling)
- Debridement - removal of dead tissues to promote healing of wound



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# How long will I be in the hospital?

The hospital will want to monitor you for a minimum of 24-48 hours to see if symptoms improve or worsen.

Your length of stay will depend upon the extent of your injuries. If you have extensive tissue damage and large wounds that need to heal, or if you need surgery, you may be in the hospital for 2-4 weeks or more.



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# Wound Care

If you were bitten by a cytotoxic snake such as a puff adder or spitting cobra, you may have large wounds which need to be kept bandaged to protect the wound. The wound will need to be cleaned and all of the dead tissue removed. This will be done for you while you are in the hospital.

You will likely need to make arrangements to go to a local clinic to have this done every 2-3 days until the doctor clears you. It may take several weeks for the wound to heal and you may need a skin graft surgery if the wound is too large to heal on its own.



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# Brief Snake Identification Guide With Pictures

See if the snake that bit you matches any of the pictures on the following pages and show the picture to the doctor when you get to the hospital.

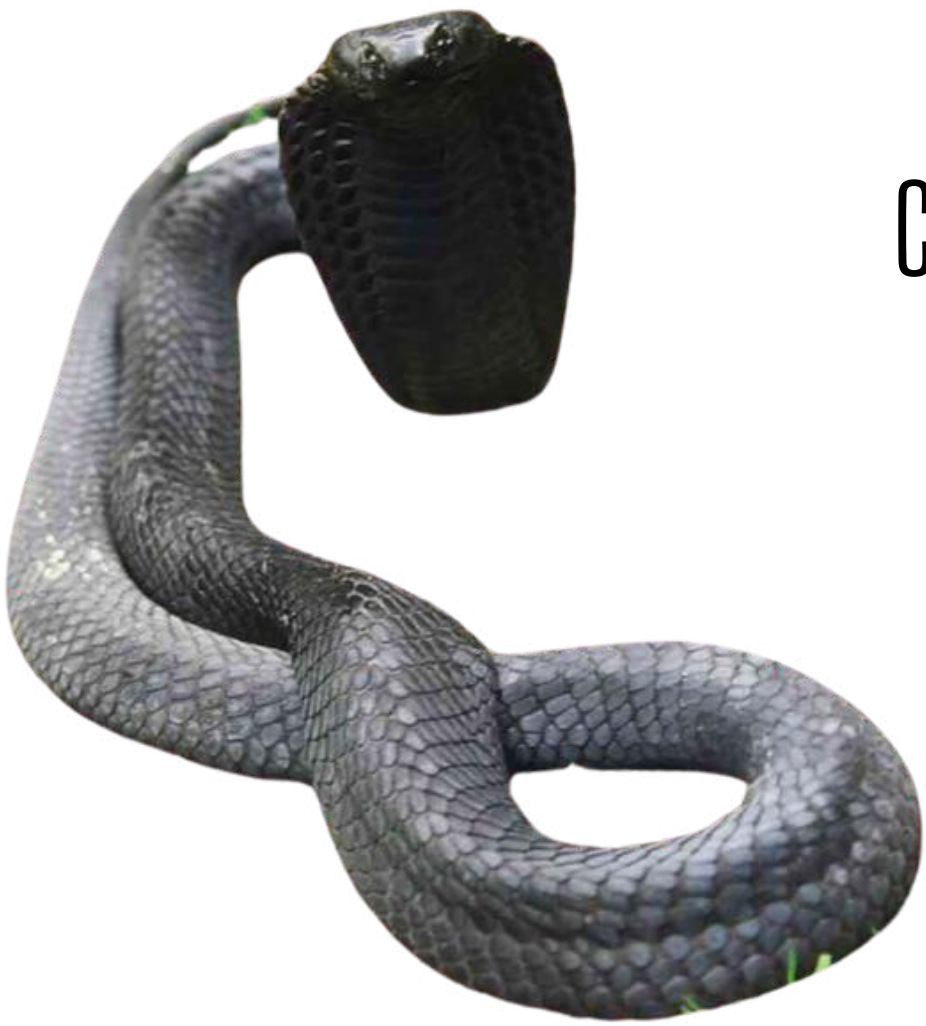
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Did it look like any of  
these snakes?



Cobras



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Did it look like any of  
these snakes?



Mambas



Boomslang  
(color variations)



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# Did it look like any of these snakes?



Carpet viper



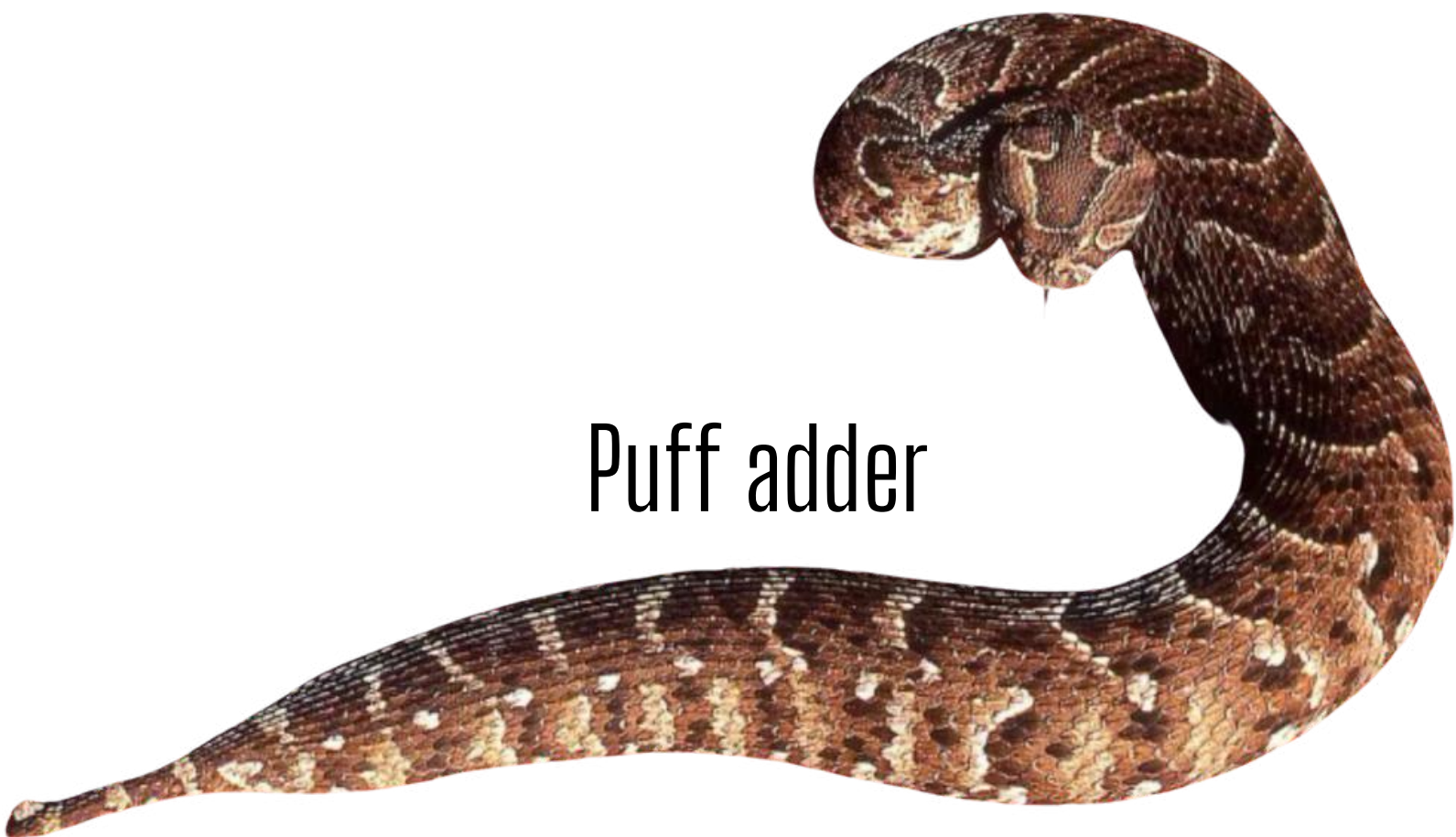
Burrowing asp



Night adder



Puff adder



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[upendoconservationarea.org](http://upendoconservationarea.org)



[scan4snakes.wixsite.com/scan](http://scan4snakes.wixsite.com/scan)

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