

# Eight ways to look after your health on expedition



Muddy boots, getting lost and singing songs in the torrential rain. After a long day of travelling in the great outdoors – whether that's by foot, sailing, cycling, kayaking or horseback riding – you'll be preparing and cooking your own meal from scratch, drying your waterproofs, pitching your tent and camping out under the stars.

Taking care of yourself and your personal hygiene is vital, as is respecting the environment. So, before you set off, look at these eight ways you can stay healthy whilst on your DofE expedition.

**– Ensure hot food is cooked all the way through.** Thorough cooking kills harmful bacteria in food. So, it's important to make sure that your meals are cooked properly. Always check that food is piping hot all the way through – it should be steaming. Stirring food when it is cooking allows the heat to be evenly distributed. Remember: don't use the same utensils or containers for raw and cooked food, and never reheat your meals more than once.

**– Make sure you clean up and wash up after every meal.** Leftover food and waste can cause stomach upsets and will attract all sorts of pests, so make sure you dispose of it responsibly (whilst also considering the Countryside Code). However, don't wash up in streams or under campsite taps or forget to wash your hands as often as you would at home – antibacterial wipes or gel can be helpful.

– **Check your water is safe to drink.** Don't take water from canals or streams, since there is a high chance it is contaminated. You will need to boil the water or use a filtration device or sterilisation process before you can drink or cook with it. You could consider boiling a pan of water and using it to make soup as a starter or a hot drink, then using the rest to cook a boil-in-the-bag pudding. Don't throw the excess water away – this can be used to do the washing up.

– **Keep your feet clean and dry.** In the evenings, wash and dry your feet and use talcum powder if possible. Pack as many pairs of socks with you as expedition days so you have a clean, dry pair every day (always take at least two pairs).

– **Ensure your boots fit properly.** Before purchasing a new pair of boots, try them on to make sure they're big enough to allow your feet to swell yet not too loose that they don't feel secure. Remember to break in your new boots, wearing them around your house or to and from school to ensure your feet feel comfortable and that you get used to walking around in them. This will help you avoid blisters and sore feet. If your foot is moving in your boot, try putting on another pair of socks.

– **Take a blister kit.** Prevention is better than cure, so put some plasters on where you've had blisters before to protect your feet from the very start of your expedition. Alternatively, wearing two pairs of socks (one thin, one thick) can significantly reduce friction in the boot and prevent blisters. It's worth investing in good expedition socks, but thick sports socks will do to save money – don't wear cotton socks. If you feel that you have a 'hot spot' rubbing on your feet, ask your team to stop and let you fix the problem before it becomes a blister, so you don't struggle the rest of the way.

– **Protect your skin.** Don't get caught out by sun and wind burn – particularly over long expedition days when you may not realise you're getting burnt. Cover your skin in loose fitting clothing that doesn't prevent sweating and use suitable, high factor sun cream. Your head and neck should be very carefully protected.

– **Carry a first aid kit.** You should carry your own first aid kit with you on expedition, adapting it to your needs, conditions or allergies. The kit should also contain plenty of disposable plastic gloves to prevent contact with bodily fluids, especially blood.