

Grand Canyon National Park PSAR Podcast #4

Self-rescue Tips

Hi, I'm Sarah with Preventative Search and Rescue. In this podcast we're going to discuss some self-rescue tips and common problems encountered by hikers on the trail. One of the great things about Grand Canyon hikers is that they tend to look out for each other. If you are seriously sick or hurt on the trail don't be afraid to ask other hikers to look for a ranger for assistance. Emergency phones are located at 1 ½ mile resthouse, 3 mile rest house, Indian Garden and Pipe Creek on the Bright Angel Trail, and at the trail head and Tip-off on the South Kaibab. You may be able to use one of the emergency phones to call for assistance, or you may be able to send another hiker to call for you. Make sure that hiker is able to describe what kind of problem you are having, and where you are located.

Let's stop and talk with this hiker. He looks like he's not feeling well.

Sarah: Hi, I'm Sarah. I'm one of the Rangers here at Grand Canyon. Can I help you today?

Hiker 2: Yeah, I'm really tired, my legs are all cramped up and I threw up a couple of times.

Sarah: How long has this been going on?

Hiker 2: Well, I hiked out from Phantom Ranch with my friends this morning about 4 am. I was really tired starting out. I've had a cold for a couple days and last night I couldn't sleep. I spent the whole night coughing. This morning I tried to eat breakfast but I couldn't get myself to eat much. I live in Los Angeles so the altitude is getting to me but I didn't want to slow my friends down. I hiked as fast as I could this morning but by the time we got to 3 mile resthouse I was just beat. I told the other guys to keep going and I'd see them at the top. But now I feel like I can't do anything.

Sarah: What have you had to eat and drink this morning?

Hiker 2: I've had about 1 liter of water and 2 little granola bars. I read the sign at the trailhead about eating salty food but all I had was this spicy trail mix and I couldn't eat it.

Sarah: Sounds like you could use some more food, some water and electrolytes. I've got some plain saltine crackers with me. They'll give you some calories and help settle your stomach. And I'll mix up some electrolyte drink for you too. For right now just rest here in the shade and try to eat and drink slowly. Are you too hot or too cold?

Hiker 2: I'm ok, I put my jacket on when I sat down.

Sarah: Good thinking. I'm going to stay here with you for a while and we'll see if you feel better after some rest, food and electrolytes.

Some of the most common problems I see on the trail are fatigue, nausea and leg cramps. Many times these problems are caused by the early stages of hyponatremia, or too little salt, along with too few calories for a high level of exertion. This hiker has done several things right. When he got tired he sat down in the shade to rest, and he has tried to eat and drink this morning. Although he's feeling sick right now, many times these problems can be resolved with rest, salty food, water and electrolytes.

Sarah: How are you feeling now?

Hiker 2: I feel a lot better. I was able to eat some crackers and pretzels and drink some electrolytes. My leg cramps and my stomachache are gone. I think I can keep walking now.

Sarah: Great! I'll walk up the trail with you and make sure you are ok. Just take it slow and rest whenever you need to. We have as much time as you need.

If you still feel sick when we get to the top there is an Urgent Care Clinic at the South Rim. In the summer the Clinic is open from 8 am to 6 pm every day.

Before we finish this podcast, let's go over a few quick tips on self-rescue:

1. Stop and rest when you start to feel tired rather than waiting until you are completely exhausted.
2. Your body can't hike hard and digest food at the same time. Rest in the shade for at least 30 minutes when you stop to eat. This will give your body time to digest the food and fuel your tired muscles. If you are still tired after 30 minutes, keep resting.
3. Stop and fix small problems while they are still small. If you ignore your body and keep pushing the pain or illness will get worse and may make recovery more difficult.
4. Avoid hiking between 10 am and 4 pm on hot days. If you are on the trail between 10 and 4 find a shady spot and stay there until the temperature cools down. Adjust you're hiking pace to what you can comfortably maintain, and rest when you need to. Have the slowest member of your group set the pace.

In our next podcast we'll go on a virtual rescue and find out how rangers help hikers who are seriously ill or injured and require advanced medical care. It's going to be exciting so make sure you take this opportunity to rest, eat some lunch and get rehydrated. See you in podcast #5.