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MEMBERS UPDATE

September 2024

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IFAKs For Concealed Carry

Selecting A Flashlight For Your Firearm

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Next Issue: Preparing Your Off-Grid Homestead For Freezing Temperatures



THE PROBLEMS WITH USING A KNIFE FOR SELF-DEFENSE

It isn't uncommon for conscientious, prepared people to carry a pocket knife. A simple folding knife is a handy tool to have if you need to cut loose strings, open a package, slice an apple, clean your fingernails, or remove a splinter. The uses for an EDC blade are practically limitless, and its beauty is in its utility.

However, many people who tote a blade as part of their EDC loadout consider it more of a weapon than a tool.

Dispatching an attacker, terrorist, or violent Antifa rioter with your Benchmade is the stuff *Jason Bourne*-inspired Alpha-male dreams are made of. However, using a knife for self-defense isn't nearly as easy as Hollywood or your own testosterone-fed fantasies make it out to be.

Using a knife for personal protection could actually be more dangerous than leaving it in your pocket. Here are a few crucial things to consider before reaching for a blade in self-defense.

KNIFE FIGHTING ISN'T AS EASY AS IT LOOKS

Carrying a knife often gives people a false sense of security. They may walk through life thinking they are impervious to violence just because there is a 3-inch folder in the front pocket of their jeans, even if they've never used it for anything other than breaking down cardboard boxes.

As the ancient Greek lyrical poet Archilochus once said, "We don't rise to the level of our expectations; we fall to the level of our training."

Few people (even experienced martial artists) have the skills to fight with a blade successfully. It takes time and practice to achieve anything close to proficiency with an edged weapon. Even some so-called experts have more confidence than actual skill.

Practicing your blade skills is essential, but just because you "know" how to defend yourself with a knife doesn't guarantee you'll be able to effectively use those techniques when someone is actively trying to carve you up like a Thanksgiving turkey.

Your blade should work like a natural extension of your hand-to-hand skills. When it doesn't, the knife is more of a liability than a self-defense asset.

Since a blade works best to augment practical combative skills, if you don't have training in hand-to-hand techniques, you should probably prioritize that before you try fighting with a knife. However, you should know that empty-hand combat techniques don't always transfer to combat with an armed opponent. It's still a good place to start.

You can take your defensive training one step further and find a defensive knife system that focuses on the mechanics of cutting and thrusting and then train diligently.



When searching for a system, you should know that some styles do not always advocate tactics and behavior consistent with responsible self-defense. It can take some serious discernment to find a system that not only works but also teaches legal and responsible defense. If you are lucky enough to find one, you should also be aware that it can take years of consistent training to achieve anything close to proficiency with a defensive blade.

YOU THINK YOU HAVE TIME

Knife fights aren't duels with opponents walking ten paces and then turning to face each other with drawn weapons. Real violence is dynamic and usually happens so fast that victims have little time to prepare a response. In a dangerous encounter, you may not have time to get to your knife and get it into the fight, even if you carry an automatic knife with a push-button opening.

Think about it this way: In the wild, ambush predators like lions, tigers, and mountain lions use stealth to stalk their prey before initiating an attack with their strong muscles and razor-sharp claws and teeth. Those prey animals, who are constantly on the lookout for danger, rarely see the attack coming before the predators are almost on top of them.



Human predators work the same way. They use the element of surprise to catch their victims unaware, leaving them confused and scrambling to defend themselves. A violent criminal isn't going to make it easy for you. Just like wild predators, a human predator isn't going to announce an attack from 20 feet away. Instead, they will target someone with their hands full of groceries, fumbling with their keys or cell phone while trying to remember where they parked their car.

If you are able to deploy your knife, hanging onto it without dropping it or hurting yourself in the chaos of a violent attack is usually a lot tougher than your imagination probably makes it out to be.

Knives are close-range weapons, so if you are using your blade as a defensive option, that means your attacker is already on top of you. And if the aggressor has a knife, you're already in serious trouble.

Security camera footage of more than two dozen knife attacks revealed that an attacker with a knife could easily stab an unsuspecting victim ten or more times in less than two seconds. There's a good chance you could end up a bloody mess before you even have time to reach for your blade.



ENDING THE FIGHT

One stab or slash from an edged weapon rarely ends a fight. It's possible your assailant won't even realize they've been wounded. If they are angry, running high on adrenaline, or under the influence of drugs, they could continue to attack. The human body can be surprisingly resilient.

Mike Janich, the founder of Martial Blade Concepts, an edged-weapon system based on Filipino martial arts, recounts a real-life situation

where an aggressor was stabbed over 50 times with a knife and managed to stay in the fight for five minutes before finally losing consciousness due to blood loss. The coroner's report confirmed that several of those stab wounds would have been lethal all by themselves, but none of them stopped the fight immediately.

Stabbing someone in the torso doesn't immediately send them to meet their maker, even if you manage to stab them multiple times. Slicing their carotid artery (one of the major arteries in the neck) doesn't necessarily do it either, although it might speed up the process.

If you don't believe that adrenaline can keep an injured body going, you should talk to deer hunters. Every bowhunter has a story of a perfectly placed shot that sent a surgically-sharp broadhead through both lungs, only to have the deer run hundreds of yards through rough terrain before finally bleeding out.

Seconds count in a self-defense situation. If you manage to mortally wound an attacker with a knife, he may still have several minutes or more to continue trying to hurt you. And every second the attack continues increases the possibility that you won't get to go home and see your family.

YOU'RE GOING TO GET CUT

A pocket knife may seem like a convenient self-defense tool, but using one for that purpose could have dire consequences. While they are small, a handy folding blade is sharp, deadly, and potentially very dangerous.

Just because you're the one holding the knife doesn't mean you won't get cut. In fact, if a knife is involved, you can almost guarantee that you will. Knife fights generally end with the loser dead in the street and the winner bleeding out in an ambulance on the way to the hospital.

Unfortunately, there are bad guys in the world who are hellbent on violence. If you aren't fluent in blade and retention skills, even an unskilled assailant can disarm you and then use the blade against you.



KNIVES ARE GORY WEAPONS

Because chopping veggies is a common component of meal preparation, most of us use knives of varying shapes and sizes on a daily basis. Our familiarity with blades as tools can create a false sense of confidence. However, slashing an attacker with a knife is altogether different from using one to slice carrots in the kitchen.

Being prepared to use lethal force is necessary if brandishing a blade. Even the goriest bits of Hollywood pop culture don't come close to capturing the violent brutality of a knife attack.

A blade battle can quickly turn into a bloodbath, with both participants covered in each other's blood, gore, and bodily fluids.

Up-close violence, where you stare the attacker in the eyes while you feel the blade slide into soft flesh, isn't for the faint of heart. It is definitely PTSD-initiating stuff.

While PTSD may be "better" than leaving the scene in a body bag, knifing someone to death is an intimate form of violence that is far different than shooting someone with a firearm.

KNIVES RARELY LEAD TO DE-ESCALATION

Many people believe that pulling a weapon in an aggressive situation is a show of force that acts as a deterrent. The idea is that just flashing your blade will convince an aggressor to back off, head home, and rethink their lives.

By inserting a knife into an argument, you automatically escalate an already volatile situation. The other person could respond by pulling his own blade or reaching for another, bigger, more powerful weapon. Suddenly, what started as a heated squabble ends with you finding yourself bringing a knife to a gunfight.



Avoiding confrontation, de-escalation, and restraint are almost always smarter alternatives. Remaining calm and non-threatening often works to dampen the other person's aggression. Provide plenty of space and end the conflict as soon as possible, even if that means walking away or apologizing when you don't think you've done anything wrong. There's no dishonor in letting the other guy win an argument for the sake of defusing a confrontation.

KNIVES CAN LEAD TO LEGAL TROUBLE

While carrying a pocket knife is perfectly legal in most areas, using one recklessly could end in serious legal trouble.

The second you pull a knife, you are using a deadly weapon. The law doesn't usually respond favorably to individuals who cause bodily harm with deadly weapons, even if the harm was done in self-defense. To justify pulling a weapon of any kind, your life must be threatened with deadly intent. That means pulling a blade on a guy at a bar because he insulted your girl is going to land you in jail (if you survive the ensuing brawl).

Even if you are justified in defending yourself, a knife can be considered excessive force. It will be difficult to convince a jury that slicing jugulars and

disemboweling three young men isn't excessive force, even if those three delinquents tried to steal your wheelchair.

Although your right to defend yourself is protected by law, navigating the legalities of every situation can be dicey. As I said before, violence is dynamic. It can be difficult to justify your actions to a group of twelve individuals sitting in cushioned chairs in an air-conditioned courtroom, especially if those jurists have never experienced actual violence themselves (and chances are good that they haven't).

Like many self-defense laws, knife laws are notoriously complicated and often downright confusing. They also vary broadly from one state to another and can even differ in certain cities within a state. Municipal laws are often stricter than state laws.

The first step in keeping yourself out of jail is to research knife laws in the areas where you live, and anywhere you travel. Fortunately, we live in the age of instant information. You can quickly and conveniently research state and local laws by downloading and using the LegalBlade app on your smartphone. However, just because using a blade in self-defense may technically be legal doesn't mean doing so won't land you in a lengthy and expensive legal battle.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The best way to win a fight is to avoid it in the first place. Always be aware of your surroundings. Stick to well-lit, populated areas whenever possible. However, despite our best efforts, we could still find ourselves in a dangerous and precarious situation. While it may be tempting to pull out your pocket knife in such situations, if you haven't had extensive training, it is probably better to leave it clipped inside the pocket of your jeans.

Before the complete dumpster fire that was the year 2020, many people naively trusted local sporting goods stores and online retailers to always have plenty of our favorite ammo in stock. Then came the COVID lockdowns, George Floyd protests, major supply chain issues, and a serious anti-gun political climate. Add in a record number of brand-new gun owners, and stores couldn't keep ammunition on the shelves.

If 2020 taught us anything, it is that you can never have too much ammo tucked away for a rainy day. After enduring months of empty shelves, we learned the hard way how important it is to have a good supply of ammunition on hand.

It's easy to find information on how to store firearms safely. Gun manufacturers, public health departments, and hunter safety courses all loudly and clearly tout the tenets of safe gun storage. However, information on safe, long-term ammo storage is a bit harder to come by. And since a firearm without ammo isn't a particularly effective weapon, proper ammo storage is essential, not just for safety, but to ensure you can use your gun whenever you need it.

What Is The Shelf Life Of Ammo?

Storing ammunition is a lot like storing canned goods, but unlike chicken noodle soup and creamed corn, .223 Rem and 9mm Luger don't have expiration dates stamped on the packaging.

Ammo manufacturers generally claim their ammo will keep for about a decade before it starts to degrade. Because we live in a lawsuit-happy society, chances are good that companies are using conservative estimates. Erring on the side of caution is a smart idea for companies in this lawsuit-happy culture.

By claiming a ten-year shelf life, manufacturers are planning ahead to dodge the litigation bullet if something goes wrong with their product past that mark.

The good news is this; if ammo is stored under the right conditions, it can last well beyond the standard ten-year recommendation. For example,



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I have personally shot ammo with a manufacturing stamp that predates my birth with no problems at all. I have also seen ammo become completely corroded in just a couple of years because it was stored in a hot, metal backyard shed.

Proper Ammo Storage

If you want your ammo to last, you need to store it under the proper environmental conditions. Extreme temperatures and humidity are your enemies.



Humidity

Moisture is ammo's biggest adversary. Too much moisture will quickly corrode brass cases and copper jackets. High humidity can even warp cartridges, making them extremely dangerous to shoot.

Moisture will also degrade primers, which can lead to problematic malfunctions.

To keep ammo from degrading during long-term storage, avoid storing it in a location prone to mold or mildew. You should definitely avoid stowing ammo in your grandma's damp basement. Especially if she lives in the Louisiana Bayou.

Speaking of the Bayou, if you live in a wet climate, you may need to take extra steps to keep your ammo dry. If you live in a humid environment (above 50 percent humidity), adding a dehumidifier to your ammo storage area can add years to the shelf life of your stockpile.



Another option is to toss a few silica gel pouches into each of your ammo cans. Silica gel is a drying agent that brands regularly add to packages to protect products from dampness. Packets can hold up to 40% of their weight in moisture due to the chemical structure of the silicon dioxide molecules inside. However, if the air around them gets too dry, they release some of the absorbed moisture.

Temperature

Ammunition can handle some pretty extreme conditions and never even break a sweat. As any veteran who served in the Middle East can tell you, scorching temperatures don't typically affect ammo performance or reliability.

However, once the thermometer hits 150 degrees Fahrenheit, nitrocellulose gas inside the cartridge begins to seep out. As the interior chemistry of the cartridge changes, it can cause major shifts in the amount of pressure in the chamber of your firearm during shooting. As pressure varies, so does velocity, which can cause serious inconsistencies downrange.

The highest recorded temperature on Earth is only 134 degrees. (That occurred in Furnace Creek

Ranch, California, in July 1913 for those interested in trivia.) That means keeping ammo cool under normal circumstances isn't all that difficult. Leaving ammo outside, even on the hottest day of the year, shouldn't cause any adverse effects.



However, the temperature inside a locked vehicle can reach a scorching 170 degrees in the middle of summer. That means the cab of your truck probably isn't the best place to store ammo, especially if it is parked in the midsummer Alabama heat (or Furnace Creek Ranch, California).

If you live in an area that experiences extreme summer temperatures, you should also avoid stashing your ammo supply in a storage shed or garage. A backyard shed that isn't adequately insulated will get really hot in the summertime, with the interior temperature spiking 30 degrees or more above the outside temp.

Freezing temperatures, on the other hand, may not degrade the powder inside a cartridge but could have a negative effect on ballistic performance. Sub-freezing temps will cause the cartridge to constrict, which can shift how the projectile is seated, causing changes in ballistic performance.

Therefore, the climate-controlled interior of your home is a much safer option for storing ammunition. Pick a dark, cool, dry spot. Interior closets and storage pantries are both practical options.

Use Quality Ammo

Grabbing the cheapest box of ammo you can find on the store shelf is tempting, especially when you're in the process of building a stockpile. However, ammo quality can have a huge impact on how well it keeps long-term.

Discount loads are cheap for a reason. Manufacturers keep the price tag low by cutting corners, especially on powder and primers. Cheaper ammo also might not be sealed as well as the more expensive stuff.

You certainly don't have to spend an arm and a leg on premium loads. However, if you want your ammo to last for years, don't pinch too many pennies. If you invest a little extra per round to get a quality product, it will pay off in the long run.

Save the Packaging

It can be super tempting to dump 500 rounds of .556 into an Army green ammo can. It just seems like the cool thing to do. However, there are several solid reasons to keep the cartridges in the box they came in.

When storing ammo long-term, you should keep it in its original packaging. Manufacturers usually want their product to be in the best condition possible when it reaches the consumer. Even the most basic ammo boxes will help prevent the cartridges inside from getting bumped, scratched, and damaged.



Ammo packaging is also already labeled with important info like cartridge, bullet type and weight, and the number of rounds inside.

Keeping ammo in its original packaging will also come in handy if you ever need to trade cartridges. For example, if you need to swap .30-30 soft points because you've upgraded Grandpa's Winchester '94 for a sleek, suppressed AR in .300 Blackout, someone will be much more willing to take those hunting loads off your hands if they are still in the original packaging.

Ammo Cans

Although you can certainly stack boxes of ammo on storage shelves like you would cans of peas, just because you can doesn't mean you should. It isn't exactly the best method for long-term storage.

Instead, pack the boxes inside ammo cans. Ammo cans usually have a waterproof seal, which provides extra protection from corrosive moisture.



Military surplus cans can often be picked up for a song. They are super durable and come in a variety of convenient sizes. However, they are surplus for a reason. Most have been used, and you run the risk of picking up a can with a damaged seal.

New commercial cans are often made of cheaper materials, sometimes even low-grade plastic. No matter where you buy your ammo cans, always inspect the seals and always choose durability over affordability.

Before you seal up the ammo can, hit the inside of your can with a hairdryer to dry up any excess moisture. Then, toss in a few silica gel or carbon desiccant packages, lock it up tight, and you should be good to go.

Spam Cans

Some types of old Russian ammo (usually 7.62x39mm or 7.62x54R loads) come in surplus "spam cans." These look just like the cans of processed pork and ham that became popular during World War II, which is how they got their name.

Spam cans are sealed steel cans that require a special old-style “key” to open, just like the grocery store Spam. Because these cans are sealed, they do a pretty good job of keeping out dust, air, and water.

Many militaries used spam cans as a way to store their ammo long-term. Sometimes, shooters can still get their hands on surplus spam cans of vintage ammo.

Some shooters swear by spam cans for long-term storage. Others are pretty critical. Spam cans are sometimes difficult to open, and once the seal is broken, they can't be resealed.

Safe Keeping

Many gun owners choose to store their ammunition in a gun safe or gun vault right alongside their firearms. Most gun safes are air-tight and temperature-controlled. Some even have built-in dehumidifiers. If your safe doesn't have integrated climate control, you can always toss in a few desiccant packets to help regulate the interior humidity.

It is worth noting that many gun safety advocates recommend storing ammunition in a safe separate from your firearms. Storing them separately lowers the chance of children or unauthorized individuals accessing a safe loaded with guns and ammo.

To Seal Or Not To Seal

Some gunowners recommend vacuum-sealing ammunition with a standard kitchen sealer for long-term storage. The idea is that sealing cartridges in plastic will lock out moisture and prevent corrosion and oxidation.

While the idea definitely sounds good, some shooters report issues with the reliability of vacuum-sealed rounds. It is possible that the process of vacuum sealing dislodges bullets and primers.

If the objective of vacuum-sealing is to protect your ammo from humidity, a surplus ammo can in good shape with an undamaged lid seal will do that, especially if that can is stored in a cool, dry place inside your home. The extra vacuum seal probably isn't worth the risk of degrading your cartridges.

Label And Rotate Your Ammunition

Be sure to label the exterior of your ammo cans so you can instantly know what is inside without having to open them up. Include important information like the cartridge, the number of rounds, and the date they were purchased.

You'll want to rotate your ammo supply just like you do your canned food stores. Whenever you hit the gun range for practice or head out to do some hunting, make sure to grab the oldest ammo in your supply. Just be sure to replace everything you use so your stockpile doesn't dwindle over time.

How Much Ammo Should You Store?

How much ammo you should store depends on your end goal and your individual needs. Considering the recent ammo shortage, having a minimum of one year's worth of ammo isn't radical. It's just plain practical.

When planning your stores, consider all of your ammo needs. Add up how much practical and practice ammo you'll burn through in a typical year. Make sure to include every cartridge you use.

Once you have that figure, it's a smart idea to add about ten percent more just to be on the safe side.

If you want to store enough ammo to last several years, just multiply your annual needs by your goal number. Since ten years is the standard accepted shelf-life for ammo, that is a fairly common goal for individuals with a preparedness mindset.

As an added bonus, a ten-year supply should be enough to get you through any two-term anti-gun presidency.

Final Thoughts

You can't just buy a bunch of ammo, throw them in the attic, and expect them to last. Just like with your firearms, a little TLC can go a long way in making your ammo last. It doesn't take hard work to extend the shelf-life of your ammunition by years, maybe even decades.



Selecting A Flashlight For Your Firearm

Like predators in the wild, human predators target the weak and unprepared. They also like to take advantage of darkness, using the shadows to preserve their anonymity and use the element of surprise to their advantage.

Many violent crimes take place under the cloak of darkness. Bad guys regularly use limited visibility to hide their intentions and their identities.

In a violent encounter, light equals power. He who controls the light controls the fight.

This is where a weapon-mounted light comes into play.

Yes, a tactical light mounted on a firearm looks cool, but it can also give you an edge in a self-defense situation.

The Benefits Of Putting A Light On Your Gun

Clearly identifying a potential target in a tactical or self-defense situation is crucial for safety and effectiveness. While handheld flashlights are a more traditional method for illuminating dark surroundings, a weapon-mounted flashlight holds several benefits over handheld models.

First, a weapon-mounted flashlight allows you to keep both hands on your weapon to maintain maximum control. It also frees up your support hand for things like opening doors.

A weapon light is also a great way to disorient an aggressive assailant, which can provide valuable seconds to assess the threat and then put rounds on target if necessary.

As a bonus, a weapon-mounted light works as a counterweight to reduce felt recoil and minimize muzzle climb, both of which can help increase the speed and accuracy of crucial follow-up shots.

The Disadvantages Of Weapon-Mounted Lights

While there are serious advantages to mounting a light on a home defense firearm, it isn't all positive vibes and happy feelings. A weapon-mounted light will regularly lead to a violation of Jeff Cooper's second Firearms Safety Rule — "Never point a weapon at anything you do not intend to shoot."

The only way to see what is lurking in a dark environment is to shine a light on it. If your only

source of light is mounted to your firearm, you will end up pointing both the flashlight and the muzzle at whatever you are trying to see. This isn't a problem if that happens to be a bad guy hellbent on violence. It becomes a whole other issue if it's your teenage son slipping downstairs for a midnight glass of water.

In some areas, pointing a gun at non-threatening humans is considered wanton endangerment, which is a criminal offense. Keep this in mind when deciding how you intend to use your weapon light.

One solution is to use a handheld flashlight as a primary light source, only switching to a weapon-mounted light once you've made the decision to engage a target.



Mounting a light on an EDC handgun comes with another set of difficulties. A light adds weight to your firearm, which can potentially sag your pants and potentially snag on the draw. Having a light on your carry gun also limits your holster options. You won't be able to grab just any old holster. You'll need to invest in one designed to fit your specific combination of sidearm and weapon light.

Choosing A Weapon Light

Advances in LED (light emitting diode) technology and battery efficiency have made modern mounted flashlights smaller, brighter, and more lightweight than ever. However, not all flashlights are created equal. Here are a few things to consider when choosing a flashlight to mount on your firearm.

Brightness

While brighter may seem better, this isn't always the case. As a shooter, you want enough light to identify your target and objects in your immediate surroundings. However, too much light can have detrimental effects on your night vision.

In addition to the adverse impact a bright light can have on vision, a brighter light generally requires more battery power. Brighter lights typically have limited battery life and are excessively heavy. You don't need a light the size of a rolling pin. While it might be bright enough to send signals to outer space, a light that large and heavy is going to have a huge impact on the maneuverability of your weapon.

What are lumens?

Lumens (lm) are internationally accepted units used to measure the amount of light produced by a light source. Most light sources, including indoor lamps, flashlights, and even streetlights, will have their brightness measured in lumens. Light output ranges from a dim 20 lumens, which is approximately the output of a typical book light, to 20,000 lumens, which is helpful if you need to illuminate a parking garage.

How many lumens do I need?

This is a question that is often hotly debated in gun circles. Some shooters staunchly believe they must have "all the lumens." However, brighter isn't always better. How many lumens you need in a weapon light largely depends on the intended use of your weapon and your mounted light.

A dimmer light may be the better option for a home defense firearm. It takes less light to brighten indoor areas than outdoor areas, which is why we use reading lamps in our living rooms and floodlights to brighten our yards.

Brighter light in a home defense situation has the potential to bounce off mirrors and even light-colored walls, which can disrupt night vision and leave you temporarily stumbling in the dark. For indoor home defense situations, 90 to 150 lumens should provide enough light to search a building,

effectively identify a home intruder, or temporarily blind an attacker.



If you use your weapon and flashlight outdoors, consider something brighter. A light with at least 500 lumens is a good place to start.

Light Beam

While it's tempting to boil the topic brightness down to simple lumens, there is another factor that comes into play. The overall brightness of your light is also influenced by the beam.

Most weapon-mounted lights will have one of two main beam configurations—a flood beam or a spot beam.

Flood Beam - Also known as a wide-angle beam, this configuration focuses light into a wide cone with uniform light distribution through the width of the beam. A flood beam creates a more natural lighting condition and increases visibility in the periphery of the beam. This wide-angle has a limited range and can make long-range target identification more difficult.

Spot Beam - A spot beam is narrow and focused, maximizing the “reach” of your light. This beam type provides better visibility at longer ranges but sacrifices close-quarter peripheral vision.

You need a beam on a self-defense firearm that is wide enough to clearly illuminate objects in the peripheral spill, but not so wide that it weakens the light's overall intensity.

Special Light Modes

Not all weapon lights come with special lighting modes, such as a strobe or laser. These features are typically reserved for pricier brands and models. They can be handy in the right situation.

Strobe - A strobe is a very bright flashing light that disorients a person, which can give you the upper hand in a violent confrontation.

Laser Sight - Some weapon lights, such as the Streamlight TLR-2, feature integrated laser sights that can be used for rapid target acquisition. Laser sights are well-suited for close-quarters point shooting.

IR Laser - Many weapon lights come equipped with an infrared laser, which is beneficial if you're using a night vision device.



Batteries

You want a reliable power source for your weapon light. Having your batteries die in the middle of a tactical, self-defense, or hunting situation could be disastrous.

A good number of weapon lights run on commonly available disposable alkaline batteries, such as AAAs, AAs, and CR123s. When investing in a light, you'll want to check the type and how many batteries it uses, as well as how many hours of run time you can expect from a fresh set.

Alkaline batteries tend to be inexpensive upfront but can be more costly in the long run, especially

if you regularly burn through batteries. They also aren't particularly durable. Alkaline batteries are prone to corrosion, which can muck up the internal workings of your light. This can be a serious problem, especially if you don't use your light regularly.

More and more brands are turning to lithium-ion batteries. Lithium batteries often produce twice the output of alkaline batteries, plus they don't degrade over time. However, they don't last forever, and when they do die, they die fast, leaving you unexpectedly in the dark. They also cost significantly more than alkaline batteries.



A weapon light with an integrated rechargeable power source is super convenient because you never have to dig through junk drawers or run to the store to find a fresh set of batteries. Instead, you just plug it into an outlet or other electrical source, give it a good charge, and you're good to go. Most models come with handy USB cords that plug right into the side of the light.

Activation Switches

Modern weapon lights can come with a variety of different activation methods. Depending on the model, you could need to manipulate a button, lever, or a tape switch.

Large rubbery buttons are commonly used on handheld flashlights. These simple, easy-to-manipulate knobs also make regular appearances on weapon lights. With a basic push of a button you have light. It doesn't get much easier than that.

In place of push-button controls, many pistol lights use levers that sit just in front of the trigger guard. This position allows shooters to easily activate the switch with the support hand. Although the placement is convenient, some lever switches can be difficult to manipulate if you're wearing gloves. This shouldn't be an issue for most home defense scenarios, but it is something to keep in mind.

Many rifle-mounted weapon lights come with tape switches. A tape switch is a separate button that connects to the flashlight with a cable. This allows you to mount the light closer to the muzzle of your firearm and still have a power switch that sits closer to the center of the handguard, where it is more easily accessible.

Durability

Every tactical flashlight needs to be durable enough to withstand the occasional impact or rough handling. However, a weapon-mounted flashlight must be particularly rugged. The internal electronics of a weapon light have to endure the recoil of a handgun, rifle, or shotgun. In addition, the lens must be sturdy enough to weather high-temperature muzzle blast and fouling without sacrificing light quality.



Even top-quality weapon-mounted lights will eventually get dirty from the carbon in muzzle gasses. Over time, that build-up can obscure the lens and dim the amount of available light. You can prevent this by performing basic maintenance, especially after you've put rounds through your firearm.

To clean your weapon light, simply use a mild solvent to dissolve the carbon, dab the liquid off the lens with a soft cloth, rinse with soap and water to clean away any remaining carbon or solvent, and then dry with a fresh cloth. Paper towels and rough fabrics can scratch the lens. For best results, use a clean microfiber cloth that has been laundered without liquid fabric softener, which can leave a streaky chemical residue on the lens.

Mounting System

When selecting a weapon light, you need to make sure it can be mounted to your gun.

Most modern large-frame semi-automatic pistols come with short rail sections that accept handgun-specific lights. Whether your handgun has an accessory rail and what type it is will greatly affect your light options. Unfortunately, if you're toting a revolver, you won't have many mounting options.

If you're mounting a light on a long gun, you want to make sure the light will securely mount on your handguard. Whether you have a Picatinny, MLOK, or KeyMod attachment system, you'll want to make sure your chosen light is compatible.

Final Thoughts

Adding a mounted flashlight to your tactical, self-defense, or hunting set-up has plenty of advantages. As with all shooting accessories, it is essential to practice shooting with your attached flashlight so you can acclimate to any changes in the feel or function of your weapon.



The modern world can be a scary place. If you watch the evening news, you know there are people out there willing and able to traumatize and damage their fellow human beings. Carrying a firearm is one way to help keep you and your loved ones safe in this often dangerous and unpredictable world.

Being responsible for your personal safety goes beyond being armed. If you or the people around you are injured in a self-defense situation, you may need to administer aid until professional help arrives. Knowing what to do and having the supplies to do it could help keep yourself or your loved ones alive to tell the tale.

If you carry a concealed handgun, it probably means that you are prepared to make holes in people if you have to. It just makes sense that you should also be prepared to patch holes as well.

WHAT IS AN IFAK?

IFAK is an acronym that stands for “individual first aid kit.” However, we aren’t talking about the miniature boo-boo kit your mom used to keep in the bathroom medicine cabinet. The concept goes far beyond the supplies she used to treat minor cuts and bruises.

The idea of an IFAK has military roots.

After analyzing data from Operation Enduring Freedom (2003-2004) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (2006), researchers found that 7.8 percent of total combat-related deaths were preventable.

As a result, military officials developed a new medical training system for all non-medical military personnel. In addition to that training, every soldier was issued an IFAK containing essential supplies to provide immediate care to themselves or wounded battle buddies.



The first military-issued IFAKs were simple in design. Packed inside modified MOLLEE 100-round SAW ammo pouches, the kits contained equipment for addressing the two major causes of preventable combat deaths — uncontrolled bleeding and airway obstruction.

The IFAKs paid off in big ways. By 2011, the percentage of preventable combat-related deaths was significantly reduced to 2.6 percent.

WHY YOU SHOULD CARRY AN IFAK

IFAKs aren’t just for soldiers, law enforcement, or first responders. These compact medical kits are designed to provide immediate medical attention in any emergency situation.

It takes EMS an average of 7-10 minutes to respond to a 911 call. That seems like a swift response until you or someone you love is bleeding uncontrollably. It only takes 2-5 minutes to bleed out due to a traumatic injury.

Carrying an IFAK and knowing how to use it is one way to take personal responsibility and become your own first responder. It also demonstrates a commitment to being not only defensively prepared but also ethically responsible in addressing the aftermath of a defensive encounter.

An IFAK can empower concealed carriers to act decisively in emergencies, whether or not they discharge their weapon. It can take them from being helpless bystanders and turn them into proactive agents of care. An IFAK, combined with basic medical training, allows the carrier to stabilize casualties and prevent further deterioration of injured individuals until advanced medical help arrives.

ASSEMBLING YOUR OWN IFAK

There are some really awesome ready-built IFAKs on the market today.



Although it is super easy and convenient to grab a pre-made IFAK online and have it show up in your mailbox a few days later, there are some real advantages to building your own personalized kit.

First, you have total control over the contents of your IFAK when you build your own. You can customize the contents to meet your needs so you don't have any superfluous stuff taking up precious space. Gathering and assembling the individual items in your kit is also the perfect way to intimately familiarize yourself with the contents. There shouldn't be anything in there that you don't know how to use.

Another option is to start with a ready-built kit and then customize the contents as you go, tossing out the stuff you don't want and augmenting with extra supplies you do.

WHAT TO PACK

Obviously, the items in an IFAK will vary from person to person. However, when the poo hits the proverbial fan, you want supplies appropriate to the situation. If you regularly tote a CCW as part of your EDC loadout, your IFAK should have supplies for treating gunshot wounds until help arrives.

While it's tempting to cut corners and pinch pennies, quality medical supplies aren't always cheap. A little extra investment is worth it here. Although you hope you'll never need to use your IFAK in an emergency situation, if you ever do, you'll want quality medical gear you can count on. Not cheap or expired supplies.

Key components of an IFAK for concealed carry should include:

Trauma Dressings

Approximately 40 percent of trauma-related deaths are caused by excessive bleeding. This means any concealed carry IFAK should contain supplies that can stop (or at least stall) blood loss.



These are sterile dressings designed to control bleeding and protect wounds from contamination. They come in various sizes and may include pressure dressings, gauze pads, and trauma bandages.

Wound packing gauze isn't recommended for wounds to the chest or abdomen. However, it can help control the bleeding or penetrating wounds to extremities, like the arms or legs.

Plain wound packing gauze is super cheap and will absolutely work if you don't have anything else. However, you can invest a few extra Washingtons and get more effective combat gauze. Medics use this stuff on the battlefield, and doctors use it in surgery. QuikClot is one notable brand that is treated with a hemostatic agent to control bleeding.

Once you stuff a gunshot wound with gauze, it should be wrapped with a compression bandage. If you want basic and simple, the elastic bandage wraps that are typically used for sprained wrists and ankles will work. However, Israeli bandages work better. An Israeli bandage is basically a sterile dressing and a compression bandage combined. It also includes a closure bar that applies 30 pounds of pressure to the wound to help slow excessive bleeding.

Tourniquet

Tourniquets are used to restrict blood flow to an arm or leg to control severe bleeding from serious injuries. Modern tourniquets are designed for rapid application and are a critical tool in hemorrhage control.

When someone you love is bleeding profusely from a traumatic wound, it is not the time to try to improvise a tourniquet. Combat application tourniquets (CAT) have saved thousands of lives on the battlefield. A CAT is far more effective and easier to use than anything MacGyver could throw together.

Find a tourniquet approved by the CoTCCC (Committee on Tactical Combat Casualty Care). There are a slew of cheap, sub-par clones on the market, so make sure you are carrying one that made the committee's list.

Several firearms holster companies have models that allow you to tote a tourniquet right next to your CCW, just like you would a spare magazine. This option keeps the tourniquet handy, ensures you never carry without this essential piece of life-saving

gear, and frees up room in your IFAK for other supplies.



It is also smart to carry a Sharpie or other permanent marker along with your tourniquet. Use the Sharpie to mark the time the tourniquet was applied. This will be important information for medical professionals when help arrives.

Medical Gloves

When rendering aid, it is crucial to consider both sides of the wound. That means you don't want to introduce germs to the injured, but you also want to make sure you don't become infected with germs from the person you are helping.

Gloves are essential for infection control and personal protection when providing medical care. They help prevent the transmission of infectious agents between patients and caregivers.

Chest Seals

An extra, unwanted hole in the chest cavity from a gunshot or stab wound will leak air into the space between the internal lining of the torso and the surface of the lungs and can prevent the lungs from expanding when you inhale.

Chest seals are occlusive dressings used to manage open chest wounds. They prevent air from entering the chest cavity so the victim can breathe adequately. While you can improvise a chest seal using two Vaseline gauze pads and some duct tape, purpose-built chest seals are simpler, safer, and easier to use.

An airway management device, such as a nasopharyngeal airway (NPA), is a flexible tube that can be inserted through the nose and into the area behind the nose and above the throat. These devices help keep the airway open to facilitate breathing in victims with compromised respiratory function.

If you carry one of these devices in your IFAK, you should also know how to properly use one to prevent potentially doing more harm than good.

Trauma Sheers

A good set of trauma sheers will slice through thick or constrictive clothing to gain better access to wounds that might not otherwise be accessible enough to treat.



OTHER ITEMS FOR YOUR IFAK

The contents of your IFAK will vary depending on its intended use, your regular environment, and the specific medical training you have. Here are a few basic supplies you might consider including:

- Mylar blanket
- Medical tape
- Burn dressing
- Alcohol wipes
- Neosporin
- Splint
- Adhesive bandages
- EpiPen

TRAINING TO USE YOUR IFAK

18 Having a perfectly-packed IFAK is relatively useless if you don't know how to use what is inside. This is

one situation where just having the gear won't solve the problem, no matter how fancy or expensive that gear may be.

An IFAK is not a substitute for skills. To be truly responsible for your safety, you should take a first-aid course and learn CPR. However, if you really want to be prepared, sign up for an EMT or Tactical Combat Casualty Care course. Many of these options are available to take online or at local community colleges.

Like shooting skills, first aid skills are perishable. Practicing both on a regular basis is imperative for proficiency.

CARRYING YOUR IFAK

While understanding why you should carry an IFAK is easy, how to carry one can be a lot more complicated. Adding more gear to your EDC loadout can be tricky, especially if you're trying to blend in at the grocery store or post office. Slipping through public spaces without drawing unwanted attention is part of the concealed carry ideology, and adding a bulky IFAK to the equation can make it nearly impossible to keep a low profile.



How you carry your IFAK is about as personal as how you carry your firearm. Everyone has personal preferences with each. It's a matter of finding what fits best into your lifestyle and ensures comfort, functionality, and accessibility. Here are some factors to keep in mind when deciding how to carry an IFK.

- **Accessibility** - In emergencies, seconds matter. Your IFAK should be easily accessible so you can get to critical supplies with minimal effort.

- **Comfort** - Carrying an IFAK should not hinder daily activities or become a burden. Comfortable carrying solutions help ensure that you'll consistently carry your kit so you are adequately prepared if an emergency situation arises.
- **Protection** - The method you choose for storing and carrying an IFAK should provide ample protection from moisture, dust, and extreme temperatures to maintain the integrity of the medical supplies inside.
- **Concealment** - In most situations, your IFAK should be inconspicuous to avoid drawing unnecessary attention while ensuring quick access in an emergency.

HERE ARE A FEW COMMON WAYS TO CARRY AN IFAK

Pocket Carry

For many people, EDC means whatever they can fit into their pockets. Although pocket-sized IFAKs are definitely a thing, you'll be limited to just the basics. Don't leave out the tourniquet even if you have to ditch the skinny jeans for something with roomier pockets.

Belt-mounted Pouches

Belt-mounted pouches offer a convenient and accessible way to carry an IFAK, keeping it within easy reach for rapid access. You'll want to make sure a belt-mounted IFAK doesn't hinder movement or get uncomfortable during extended wear.

Adding a med kit, your CCW, and extra mags can weigh down a belt quickly. It isn't always a feasible option if you're trying to maintain a low signature, either.

Backpacks and Laptop Bags

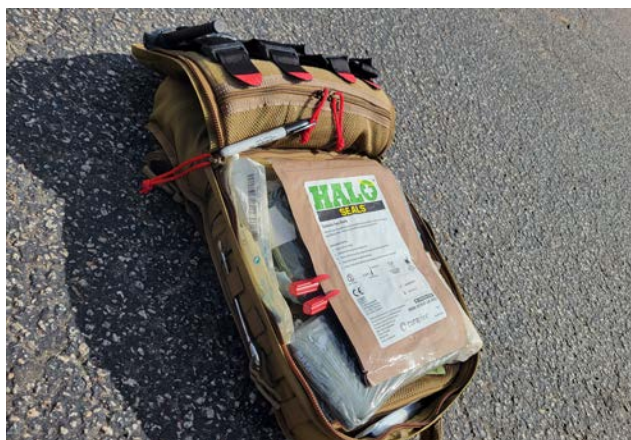
For outdoor enthusiasts, hikers, and individuals in non-tactical settings, integrating the IFAK into an everyday backpack is a practical solution. Dedicated compartments or pouches within the backpack can securely house the IFAK while keeping it easily accessible.



Toting an IFAK in a backpack offers versatility and comfort and allows you to carry things like a laptop, snacks, or other survival gear alongside the IFAK without sacrificing accessibility.

Another option is to stow your med kit in a laptop bag. This is an effective method for anyone in professional roles to expand their EDC loadout while keeping things covert.

One major disadvantage of off-body carry is that you can't bring a bag with you everywhere. Courthouses, concerts, and even some stores won't allow you to enter with a backpack or any other bag.



It can also be tempting to leave your bag in the car while you run into a building to run an errand or pick up some lunch. If an emergency arises while you're inside, it could be difficult to access the medical supplies you left outside.

It's a smart idea to keep at least a compact kit of basic supplies on your person, even if you decide to keep a larger IFAK in your car or truck.

Ankle Holsters

Ankle holsters provide a discreet and concealed method of carrying an IFAK. If you're trying to play the Gray Man or work in an environment where overtly displaying medical supplies is less than desirable, ankle carry could be the perfect solution.

An ankle holster will securely hold an IFAK in place and allows for quick retrieval. However, some ankle holsters can become exceedingly uncomfortable during extended wear. If your ankle IFAK does draw someone's attention, they probably aren't going to immediately think you're hiding medical supplies. They are probably more likely to think "ankle monitor," which could make them decide to give you a wide berth.

Waist Packs Or Fanny Packs

Waist packs or fanny packs provide a compact and versatile option for carrying an IFAK in everyday settings. These packs offer enough space for essential medical supplies while remaining inconspicuous and comfortable.

Although fanny packs were super popular back in the 1980s, they are slowly coming back into style. That means unless you're using your favorite neon pink fanny pack from middle school, most people won't think twice about seeing you wear one.



Waist packs can be worn around the waist or across the chest, allowing you to customize your carry style to maximize comfort and accessibility.

FINAL THOUGHTS

What you choose to pack in your IFAK or how you carry it are primarily matters of personal preference. Ultimately, the best IFAK for concealed carry is the one that empowers you to not only carry it daily but also to respond confidently and effectively to emergencies so you can potentially save lives when seconds count.





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