

Fishing – preventing injury

People of all ages and fitness levels can enjoy fishing. It's an activity which has the highest participation rate of any recreational or sporting activity in Australia. Most fishing injuries are due to cutting or piercing objects, falls or overuse injuries. Most injuries occur at a river, creek or lake (37 per cent), or at or by the sea (31 per cent).

Compared with other recreational activities, the risk of injury is low and most injuries are not serious. However, each year an average of 20 people drown while fishing in Australia. Rock and ledge fishing is particularly dangerous. In New South Wales, 74 people died in rock fishing accidents between 1992 and 2000.

Stay safe while fishing

Some general safety suggestions to keep in mind while fishing include:

- Never go fishing alone. Always fish with someone else and, ideally, with two other people. If one person is injured, a second person can stay with them while the third person seeks help. This is especially important when rock fishing.
- Let somebody know the location of your fishing trip, who you are going with and an approximate time you will be back.
- Carry a charged mobile phone with you at all times.
- Wear non-slip shoes and take care to avoid slipping or cutting yourself on sharp, rocky edges.
- Lightweight garments worn in layers are highly recommended. Bulky woollen jumpers become extremely heavy and difficult to remove if you fall in the water.
- Carry a first aid kit with you.
- Wear a sun hat, 30+ sunscreen and sunglasses.
- Take adequate drinking water.

Alcohol and fishing

Avoid drinking alcohol while fishing. Alcohol can impair your judgment. It also seriously affects your chances of survival if you fall in the water.

Life jackets

A life jacket can save your life if you fall into the water, whether you are on a boat or near the water. It is extremely difficult to put on a life jacket when an emergency occurs or when you are in the water. It is safer to wear a life jacket at all times, before any emergency occurs. In Victoria, life jackets or personal flotation devices are compulsory on:

- Powerboats up to 4.8 metres long
- Off-the-beach sailing yachts
- Personal watercraft
- Canoes, kayaks and rowing boats
- Pedal boats and fun boats
- Kiteboards and sailboards
- Recreational tenders.

Children under the age of 10 must wear a specified personal flotation device at all times on any vessel.

Other recommendations include:

- Wear a life jacket when fishing off rocks, ledges, a riverbank or a boat.
- Make sure a life jacket is available for each person, including children, and that they are worn at all times while in or near the water.

Use fishing equipment safely

Fishing hooks and rods can be dangerous if not handled with care. Some suggestions include:

- Make sure the hook is secure and hold the rod parallel to the ground when you carry your fishing rod.
- Fish hooks should be covered or removed from fishing rods before transporting. Exposed hooks on rods should be corked or placed in a hook safety cover.
- Fish at least 10 metres away from the person next to you.
- Check there isn't anyone behind you when you cast.
- Instruct beginners and children on safe rod and hook procedures.

Weather

Staying aware of weather conditions is an important part of fishing safety. Make sure you have the most up-to-date local weather information available and be prepared for sudden changes. For coastal locations, take particular note of unexpected tide and swell conditions.

See over ...

Rock fishing

Rock fishing is a dangerous activity. Many fishing fatalities occur while people are rock fishing. Some safety suggestions include:

- Make sure you have a thorough understanding of the area where you are fishing: the tidal behaviour, accessibility to the area and an escape plan. If the swell threatens where you are standing, leave immediately.
- Fish in a group of at least three people and always stay in sight of each other. Never fish by yourself. If one person is washed into the sea, another person can stay and assist while the third person gets help.
- Learn to swim if you can't swim. Classes are available for adults as well as children.
- Wear a life jacket or buoyancy vest.
- Do not wear waders when rock fishing. These can quickly become heavy if you fall in the water.
- Look for secure footholds and stay away from sloping, slippery edges.
- Obey all danger signs.
- Do not turn your back on the sea.

Surf fishing

- Do not enter rips to fish.
- Learn how to read the surf before you begin surf fishing, and how to identify and avoid rips.
- Go to gentle sloping beaches with a non-threatening wave pattern – these are ideal for safe surf fishing.

Boat fishing

- Plan carefully before going out on the water. Ensure all your safety equipment, including a radio, is in good working order before you go out in the water. Also check fuel levels before you leave.
- Have your motor and boat serviced regularly.
- Update your boating knowledge and practise your skills.

If you fall in the water or an injury occurs

- Do not feel for the bottom with your feet. Underwater rocks, tree trunks and debris are less likely to snare your trailing hands; try to steer towards a clear bank feeling for the bottom with your hands.
- Stop fishing immediately if an injury occurs and seek prompt medical treatment.
- Always carry a charged mobile phone with you in case of emergency.

Where to get help

- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777
- Marine Safety Victoria Tel. (03) 9655 3399
- Your local swimming pool for lessons.

Things to remember

- Never go fishing alone – always fish with someone else and, ideally, with two other people.
- Let somebody know the location of your fishing trip, who you are going with and an approximate time you will be back. Carry a charged mobile phone on you at all times.
- Stop fishing immediately if an injury occurs and seek prompt medical treatment.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by Smartplay Victoria. The Better Health Channel is part of the Department of Human Services, Victoria

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