

Safety on U3A Walks

Introduction.

These notes are a collection of general information concerning Health and Safety on walks and is intended for the leaders of U3A walking groups. Some of this information maybe considered to be common sense by experienced walks leaders but others will find some helpful hints.

Any specific safety concerns should be addressed to the U3A National Office or the U3A Walking Network Advisor for guidance. Where the U3A have issued specific advice on Health and Safety aspects these are highlighted in these notes.

The implementation of any safety procedures is at the discretion of the walking group leaders.

General Information.

General safety information, which could be made available to walkers by U3A group leaders maybe similar to the following:-

“The person responsible for their safety and happiness on a walk is the individual. The U3A leader will lead the walk and will probably carry a basic first aid kit but they may not have specific medical training. The walk leaders will show their group the way on the walk but it is up to the individual to be careful in following them and to know their own capabilities and limitations.

Walks organised by U3A groups automatically have public liability insurance cover, provided the walkers are U3A members. However, this is not a personal accident insurance and all members must be aware they walk at their own risk.

Members are requested to walk behind the leader and to stay with the group at all times.

Should any member have any underlying health problems that may affect them during a walk or any medication that they may need, they should ensure that the medication is brought with them and that either the walk leader or a trusted companion knows what to do in the event of any problem.

Members are asked, if possible, to carry with them a contact name and telephone number which could be used should the need arise. This may be stored on a mobile phone under the name “ICE” (In Case of Emergency). The U3A do provide “In Case of Emergency” (credit card sized) cards for the use by its members.

It is important to carry adequate drinks, especially in the warmer weather, to replenish body fluids as it is easy to become dehydrated without realising it.

Despite all the above, the objective of a U3A walking group is to enjoy the walking.”

Preparation.

The U3A have recently issued a **risk assessment guide** entitled '**WALK LEADER CHECKLIST**' which includes a list of information for prospective walkers. Items required by walks' leaders are food / drink / compass / map / whistle / mobile phone. Additional equipment items, (depending upon the location and terrain) are a basic first aid kit, survival bag, fluorescent yellow jackets / waistcoats, a torch and two-way radios (for easy communications between the walk leader and back-marker).

A first aid kit suitable for walkers should include antiseptic creams, aspirin, tape, bandages, plasters and light plastic gloves (to reduce transmission of infection). Ready-made first aid kits for walkers are available from outdoor gear shops and [St John Ambulance](#) have a kit especially for walkers as do the [British Red Cross](#).

U3A walking groups are not required to have trained first aiders and the insurance advice is to contact the emergency services immediately in the event of a serious incident, even if there happens to be a member present who has attended a first aid course.

First aid is best learned by attending a practical training course such as those offered (in the UK) by the Red Cross, St John's Ambulance Brigade and specialist training companies, some funded by local councils.

Before setting out, it's also wise to find out if any of your companions are taking any medications and / or have any long standing illnesses such as diabetes or asthma. It's important that everyone understands what will be encountered during the day and is confident that this is within his / her abilities. Warn your members about possible hazards on a walk, e.g., stiles and if walking by water, a river or canal, they should be aware of narrow / uneven footpaths, towpath mooring posts etc.

ICE (In case of an emergency) recommend that your members carry either a **U3A ICE card** or if they carry a mobile they have entered the phone number of a person to whom they would wish to be contacted should they have an accident on a walk.

Yellow fluorescent high visibility jackets / waistcoats are useful for the leaders and back-makers when walking with a group in an urban street environment. (£5.99 from [worknleisure.co.uk](#)). Your own U3A logo can be added to the jackets.

Planning.

When selecting a route think carefully about the following:-

- the availability of paths or open country as road traffic can pose a hazard
- are the start and finish points safe for a group to congregate?
- the length of the walk should never be so much to tax unduly the capability and experience of your group
- plan for alternative and escape routes should the weather conditions deteriorate
- preferably recce the route with a colleague (someone who could act as the back-marker on the actual walk)

When walking in remote areas and the high hills, it is essential that at least one person in the group has some basic competence in First Aid. The application of those skills in remote areas and in wet, cold and / or windy weather, can be a challenge when dealing with emergencies and any illness or injury is potentially more dangerous and difficult to deal with.

Check your mobile phone is operative within the area of the walk and its battery is fully charged on the day of the walk. Encourage your members to carry their mobile phones (fully charged) on your walks (useful should they become separated from the group) and have a record of their phone numbers in your contacts book.

Carry a camera or mobile phone/camera to record (and report) any unexpected hazard or obstacle along a footpath.

Incident Management.

Even a relatively small incident can be exacerbated by other factors or trigger other events. As the leader of the group, you will need to make decisions about the most appropriate course of action. You will need to balance the range of risks for all concerned - sometimes a daunting task. The first priority is to move everyone away from immediate danger. Next, you must assess the state of the injured person applying standard first aid practice.

Clearing a blocked airway is probably the most important life-saving action a first-aider can take. Most blocked airways can be cleared by following simple, basic manoeuvres. The three common techniques (tipping the head back, chin lift and jaw thrust) are best learnt on a practical training course such as those mentioned above.

The U3A have an **ADVICE SHEET** which covers **FIRST AID** and a copy is available from the U3A National Office or The U3A Walking Network Adviser.

The essential advice is as follows:-

- In the event of an accident or a U3A member being taken seriously ill, regardless of whether there is a member present with a current first aid qualification, you are advised to contact the emergency services immediately (999/112). You must state the location where you are, including:
 - the address and postcode – if relevant
 - or
 - the map reference (if you are familiar with the Ordnance Survey Grid Reference System and are confident that you can give an accurate number)
 - or
 - as precise a description as you can
- your phone number or the phone number you are calling from and as clearly and concisely as you can, what has happened.

First aid treatment should only be administered under their direction, unless you are facing an emergency ie., the casualty is struggling to breath normally or is unconscious or has severe bleeding. If a trained first aider is present then that person should be the one to make the emergency call and follow any instructions. In the event of a fall, keep the person warm and dry - DO NOT attempt to move the person unless they are in immediate danger.

The British Red Cross has published some useful information on "Treating Injuries" including heart attack, fractures, bleeding, shock, sprains and strains, hypothermia and heat exhaustion at www.redcross.org.uk/firstaid or call 0844 871 8000.

Conclusion.

Walking with the U3A is the most popular, enjoyable and safest form of physical exercise. However, in view of the age group of our walkers, the walk leaders should be aware of possible Health and Safety issues and how to deal with accidents.

Neil Meek
U3A Walking Advisor
November 2011

Source of useful Information:

U3A National Office:

The Third Age Trust
The Old Municipal Buildings
19, East Street
Bromley
Kent, BR1 1QE
Phone: 020 8466 6139
www.u3a.org.uk

For information relating to insurance, first aid advice, accident forms, walk leader checklist etc.

U3A Walking Network - U3A/Subject Advice/Walking

www.u3a.org.uk/subject-networks/120-walking.html

This webpage has contact details for the U3A Walking Network Advisor

The Ramblers:

www.ramblers.org.uk

For walking information, practical advice, leading group walks etc.,

go4awalk.com

www.go4awalk.com

An excellent website with information by experts on dealing with emergencies, contacting the emergency services etc.

British Red Cross

www.redcross.org.uk/firstaid or call 0844 871 8000.

For first aid information and courses

Ordnance Survey magazine

.magazine.ordnancesurveyleisure.co.uk/

“What to take in your Daysack”, “Strains & Sprains – walking injuries and what to do about them”, “Safety on the hills”.

Surrey First Aid Training

.surreyfirstaid or 0845 833 1493

Providers of First Aid and Health & Safety Training in the South East

Country Walking Magazine

.greatmagazines.co

An article “Welcome to Walking, Part Four – Safety”