

Make no mistake about it, surfing is a dangerous sport. For one thing, it takes place in the ocean. Waves and currents are unpredictable to begin with. Add to that a wipe out in which your board may hit your head, fins may cut you, leashes may wrap around and break a finger and you get the idea. Here are some tips to keep you out of harm's way:

Always stay far enough apart so your neighbor's board can't hit you or so that your board won't hit anyone else. That is to say that if you have a 9 foot board and a 10 foot leash, you must stay 20 feet apart from anyone and everyone around you.

Don't position yourself between another surfer and the beach. You never know how good of a surfer they are and if they catch a wave, they may have little control to avoid running you over. Do yourself a favor and stay off to the side.

Keep two hands on the board at all times. This is especially important when walking out into waist deep water. If a wave crashes over that board, it can carry into your face with more force than you realize. This is how broken noses and black eyes occur. Even if the board avoids you, it can hit an innocent bystander. Keep your board facing directly into the breaking waves and keep control of it with both of your hands. Whatever you do, try not to let go of the surfboard completely.

When you wipe out, stay calm under the water. Remember that your leash is connected to your board which floats upon the surface. When in doubt, follow your leash for air. If your leash snaps and you can't find which way is up, open your eyes. Salt water may sting but it won't blind you.

As you come up for air, cover your head and face with your arms. Your board may be waiting above your head for a little bump or it can snap back and give your head a bigger bump. If you feel a sharp tug on your leash at your ankle, beware that the board may be flying back towards you. If you can help it, stay under water for another second or two. Also beware if there is no pull of your leash at all. That's an indicator that your board may be floating above your head. Either way, cover your head as you surface.

If you do get hurt, immediately leave the water. If you cannot leave the water, seek assistance to do so. If your board is within reach, get on it and stay on it. Try to catch a wave and ride it in on your stomach to safety.

Don't wander off alone. Stay near others in case of accidents. Watch others periodically in case they get hurt. If they do, never approach them without a floating device (i.e. surfboard). A drowning person will jump on you to keep themselves afloat.

Stay aware of currents. Focus on one point on land to make sure you are not drifting away. If you are drifting out to sea, you may be caught in a rip current. This is when two opposing

currents meet head on along the shore and have nowhere to go but out to sea. Usually these currents are no more than 20 feet wide. Don't fight the current by swimming straight to shore. Swim parallel to shore until you're free of the current and then swim to shore.

Do not surf in a lightning storm. Do I have to explain any further?

If you feel uncomfortable for any reason, do not be afraid or embarrassed to leave the water. You can always surf another day.