

Why bears do what they do.

Bear attacks are uncommon. Wild animals generally prefer to avoid people and bears are no exception. **Most** encounters between bears and people occur when the bear's natural avoidance behaviour shifts to aggression because of the following factors:

1. You surprise them.
2. They are protecting young or food.
3. They follow food and food-like odours to you.
4. Your dog provokes an attack.
5. The bear you encounter is habituated to people and has lost its natural fear.

These guidelines to safety in bear habitat are just that—guidelines. Bear behaviour is hard to predict because they are complex animals. Each bear is an individual with the potential to react differently in different situations. The information provided here will give you some basics on how to avoid an encounter in the first place and guidance on how to react should one occur.



Parks Canada recommends carrying bear spray with you at all times.

Bear Spray

Research indicates that bear spray can be effective with some bears when used properly. If you plan to carry it, be aware that wind, spray distance, rain, freezing temperatures and product shelf life can all influence its effectiveness. Familiarize yourself with the proper use of bear spray (including the manufacturer's specific instructions) and keep it readily accessible. *However, the best way to live safely with bears is to avoid contact with them.*

Photo Credit: Mark Raycroft, Brian Wolitski and Parks Canada

Camping in Bear Country

In Serviced Campgrounds Bear Proof your Food! Become familiar with bear "attractants" - those items that might attract a bear to your site. Never leave these items unattended. Store them in the trunk of your vehicle or in your hard-sided trailer when not in use. Remember hardtop / tent trailers are not bear proof!

- **Stash your Trash!** All garbage should be placed in the bear-proof garbage containers provided. If you choose to store small amounts of garbage at your site, keep it with your food in the trunk of your vehicle or in your hard-sided trailer.
- **Keep your sleeping gear, tent, and tent trailer clean and free of food odours.** Never cook in or near your tent or tent trailer.
- **Dispose of wastewater from cooking** or doing dishes in washrooms or at the dumping station. Clean up promptly after meals.

Problem Bears are Created by People Bears are opportunists, always on the lookout for a few "easy" calories. Once they find human food or garbage, they continue to seek it out - from backpacks, picnic tables, coolers, etc. Soon they become accustomed (or habituated) to humans, their natural fear of people fades and they take more and more chances in order to find food rewards. These "spoiled bears" are unpredictable and may be aggressive.

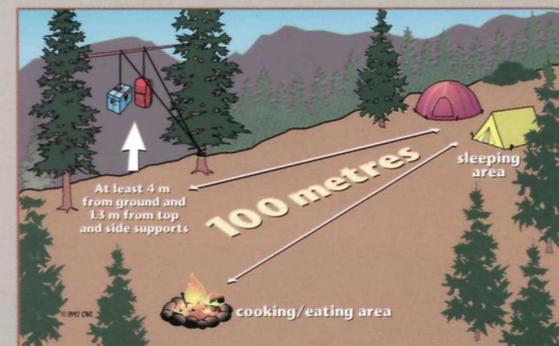
Unfortunately, there is little that can be done to manage habituated, food conditioned bears. Often these animals pay with their lives for human mistakes. The only true solution is to not create "problem bears" in the first place by making sure all of our food, trash and other possible bear attractants are stored properly.

PLEASE REPORT ANY BEAR SIGHTINGS TO PARK STAFF!

Camping in Bear Country

Back Country Camping To stay safe and protect wilderness, travel with two goals in mind: limiting your impact by avoiding encounters and managing your food, food smells and garbage.

- **Camp in designated areas** where provided. Avoid camping near running water, thick brush, animal trails or berry patches.
- **Keep yourself and campsite odour free**—set up cooking, eating and food storage areas at least 100 metres from your tent and consider wind direction. Keep sleeping bags, tents and sleeping clothes free of food, food odours or beverages.
- **Leave smelly cosmetics at home**—Store toiletries and personal items with food.
- **Store your food, pet food and garbage away from your tent.** Use the bear poles provided.
- **Wash and store all dishes and food utensils immediately after use.** Strain food particles from dish water and store with garbage. Dump dish-water in designated areas or at least 100 metres from your sleeping area.
- **Pack out garbage**—do not burn or bury it. Same storage as food.



BEARS AND PEOPLE

A guide to safety and conservation on the trail.



READ this brochure carefully.
Your behaviour affects the survival of wildlife and your own safety.



Parks Canada Parcs Canada

Canada

1. AVOIDING an encounter

Make noise!

Watch for fresh bear sign.

Keep your dog on a leash *at all times*.

Travel in groups.

Never approach a bear. (Always maintain a distance of at least 100 metres).

- **Make noise!** Let bears know you're there. Call out, clap hands, sing or talk loudly—especially near streams, dense vegetation and berry patches, on windy days, and in areas of low visibility. (Some research shows that bear bells are not enough).
- **Watch for fresh bear sign.** Tracks, droppings, diggings, torn-up logs, turned-over rocks are all signs that a bear has been in the area. Leave the area if the signs are fresh.
- **Keep your dog on a leash at all times** or leave it at home. Dogs can provoke defensive behaviour in bears.
- **Travel as part of a group** if possible and *never* let children wander.
- Use officially marked paths and trails and travel during daylight hours.
- If you come across large dead animals, leave the area immediately and report it to Park Wardens.
- Dispose of fish offal in fast moving streams or the deep part of a lake, *never* along stream sides or lake shores.

2. HANDLING an encounter

Stay calm.

Get your bear spray ready.

Speak to the bear.

Back away slowly, **NEVER** run.

- **Stay calm** and don't alarm the bear with screams or sudden movements. Your calm behaviour can reassure it. Bears may bluff their way out of an encounter by charging and then turning away at the last second. Bears may also react defensively by "woofing", growling, snapping their jaws, and laying their ears back. It's difficult but important to remain calm if a bear reacts to you this way. A scream or sudden movement may trigger an attack.
- **Speak to the bear.** Let the bear hear your voice—talk calmly and firmly. This lets the bear know you are human and not a prey animal. If a bear rears on its hind legs and waves its nose about, it is trying to identify you.
- **Back away slowly, never run!** Running may trigger a pursuit and bears can run as fast as a racehorse, both uphill and downhill.
- **Make yourself less vulnerable**—pick up small children and stay in a group.
- **Don't drop your pack.** It can provide protection.
- Always **leave the bear an escape route.**

3. Handling an ATTACK.

Most encounters with bears end without injury. If a bear **actually makes contact**, you may increase your chances of survival by following these guidelines. In general, there are **2** kinds of attack:

DEFENSIVE

What is the bear's behaviour?

The bear is feeding, protecting its young and/or unaware of your presence. It attacks because it sees you as a threat.

Use bear spray.

If the bear makes contact with you: PLAY DEAD!

PLAY DEAD. Lie on your stomach with legs apart and position your arms so that your hands are crossed behind your neck. This position makes you less vulnerable to being flipped over and protects your face, the back of your head and neck. Remain still until you are sure the bear has left the area.

 These defensive attacks are generally less than two minutes in duration. If the attack continues, it may mean the attack has shifted from defensive to predatory—fight back!



Bottom line?

It is very difficult to predict the best strategy to use in the event of a bear attack. That is why it is **so** important to put thought and energy into avoiding an encounter in the first place.

PREDATORY

What is the bear's behaviour?

The bear is stalking (hunting) you along a trail and then attacks. Or, the bear attacks you at night.

Try to escape into a building, car or up a tree.

If you can't escape, DON'T PLAY DEAD. Use bear spray and fight back!

FIGHT BACK! Intimidate that bear: shout; hit it with a branch or rock, do **whatever** it takes to let the bear know you are **not** easy prey. This kind of attack is very rare but it is serious because it usually means the bear is looking for food and preying on you.



Cyclists!

Your speed and quietness put you at risk for sudden bear encounters.

- Slow down through shrubby areas and approaching blind corners;
- Make noise, travel in groups, be alert and always watch ahead. (Go back to the section on *Avoiding an Encounter* for other advice).

