

Saltwater Fishing Basics

Things to Know Before You Go

Anglers should be prepared for each fishing trip with important details such as the fishing location, supplies needed for the trip, methods for rigging tackle, common species caught, regulations for targeted species and proper catch-and-release techniques. The following pages include resources you can use to help prepare for any fishing trip. Be sure to pack this guide in your tackle box to use as a reference during your time on the water.



Rods and Reels

Spinning: Designed for use in either freshwater or saltwater. Available in a wide range of sizes, depending on where you want to use them. These rods and reels have a bail that winds the fishing line onto the reel. To cast, lift the bail, hold the fishing line between your finger and the rod and cast while letting go of the fishing line. The spinning reel is also known as the open face or flip-bail reel.



Bait-Casting: These rods and reels can be used in either freshwater or saltwater. They are designed so the spool that holds the line rotates when letting line out or retrieving line. These rods and reels are available in a wide variety of sizes and styles for use in many situations. Some have a device to wind the line neatly onto the spool. Bait-casters have a high potential for tangles and take practice to fish properly.

Conventional: These rods and reels are generally used to catch large fish from offshore. Most conventional rods and used for trolling or bottom-fishing, but not casting. Like bait-casting reels, conventional reels are designed so the spool holding the line rotates when releasing and retrieving line. But, they have a high potential for tangles and take practice to fish properly.



Fly: A fly rod and reel uses the weight of the line to carry the lure to the fish. Lures for fly-fishing are very light and made from feathers, fur and fiber. Fly-fishing requires training and lots of practice to fish properly.

Fishing Line

The type of fishing line to use depends on your situation and personal preference.

Monofilament: Single strand of nylon. It typically holds knots better, is easy to cast, has low visibility, shows some abrasion resistance and is less expensive than other fishing lines. But, it can stretch out over time and deteriorate from ultraviolet light exposure.

Suggested uses: A good all-around fishing line to use in many different situations

Fluorocarbon: Single strand of polyvinylidene fluoride. It has very low visibility and stretch, resistance to abrasion and ultraviolet light, good knot strength and it sinks to the bottom. However, it can be very stiff to tie and is more expensive than monofilament.

Suggested uses: As leader material or in clear water

Braid: Fused or braided strands of polyethylene. It has a smaller diameter, further casting distance, low stretch and exhibits resistance to ultraviolet light and abrasions. But, only certain knots (such as the uni knot) should be used with braid, it is highly visible in the water and it costs more than monofilament.

Suggested uses: Fishing near structure or on the bottom and while using lures that spin

Leader: Material attached between the fishing line and the hook. Leaders can be made of low-visibility fluorocarbon, hard monofilament, steel, titanium or other materials depending on the target species. They provide increased protection from sharp edges and can be less visible than most fishing line.

Suggested uses: When targeting large or toothy fish and when fishing near sharp structure

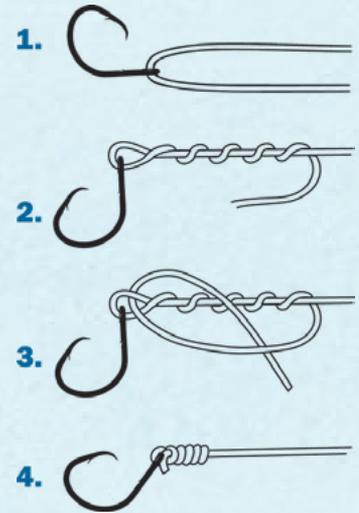


Fishing Knots

Things to Remember: Match the knot to a function, tie the knot correctly, wet the knot prior to fully tightening it and trim the tag end to 1/8 inch after the knot is completely tightened. The tag end is the active end of the line used to tie a knot. The standing line is the longer end of the line that is not used to tie a knot.

Improved Clinch Knot – Used to tie line to hook, swivel or some artificial lures.

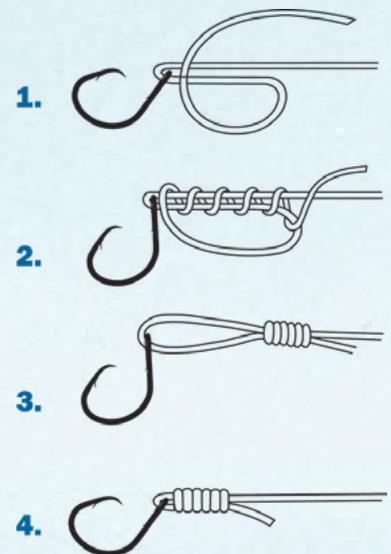
1. Thread line through the eye of the hook and double-back parallel to the standing line.
2. Using the tag end, make five or more twists around standing line.
3. Take the tag end back toward the hook and push it through the first loop nearest the eye. Then, bring the tag end through the big loop that was just created.
4. Holding the hook and line, moisten the knot and pull it tight against the hook eye.



Improved Clinch Knot

Uni-Knot – Used to tie line to hook, light line to heavy line and in many other applications.

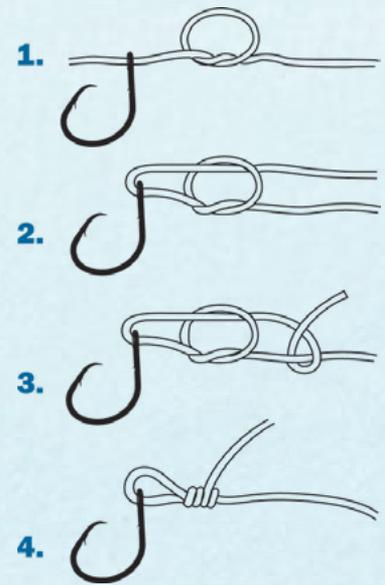
1. Run line through the eye of the hook and double-back parallel to the standing line. Make a loop by laying the tag end over the doubled line.
2. Make six turns with the tag end around the doubled line and through the loop.
3. Moisten the lines and pull the tag end to snug up the turns.
4. Slide the knot down to the eye or leave a small loop, if desired.



Uni-Knot

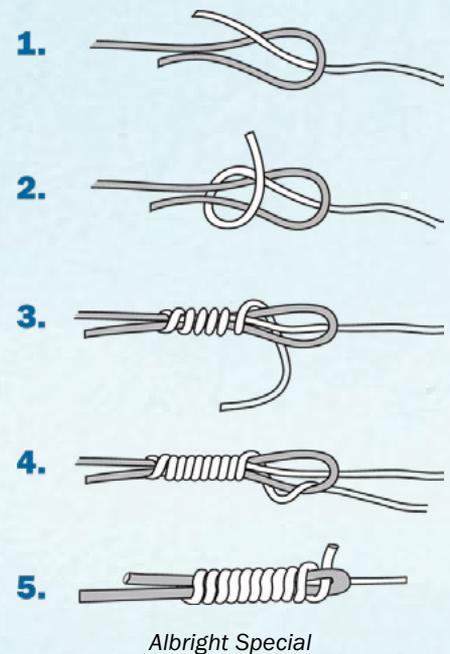
End-Loop Knot – Used to tie leader to lures that require freedom of movement, like jigs and plugs, by leaving a loop near the lure eye.

1. Tie a simple overhand knot in the line several inches from the tag end; do not tighten the knot at this point.
2. Insert the tag end through the lure eye, then insert the tag end through the wide portion of the overhand knot while keeping the knot loose.
3. Loop size is determined by moving the overhand knot a desired distance from the lure eye. Make a simple half-hitch with the tag end around the standing part of the line **ABOVE** the overhand knot.
4. Moisten the knot and pull tight on the line and lure to cinch the knot.



Albright Special – Used to tie light line to heavier line, such as a leader.

1. Make a loop with the heavier line. Run about 10 inches of the lighter line through the loop.
2. Hold the three lines between your thumb and index finger. Wrap the light line back over itself and both strands of the loop.
3. Make 10-15 tightly wrapped turns with the light line.
4. Feed the tag end back through the loop, exiting the loop from the same side as it entered.
5. Hold the light line and pull on both ends of the heavy line to slide the wraps to the end of the loop. Moisten and pull knot tight.



Terminal Tackle

Circle Hook: Fishing hook with the point sharply curved back to the shank to form a circular shape. The curved shape causes the hook to catch in the corner of a fish's mouth. These hooks should not be set; instead, anglers simply reel and maintain tension on the line.

Jig Head: Fishing hook molded into a heavy sinker and can be covered with a soft artificial lure.



Circle Hook



Jig Head

Swivel: Piece of metal that attaches the leader to a line and spins or rotates at the leader, which keeps kinks and twists out of the main line.

Snap: Piece of metal that can attach to a swivel (**Snap-Swivel**); it helps an angler switch tackle quickly.



Swivel



Snap



Snap-Swivel

Split Shot: Weight that can be pinched onto monofilament; adds weight to a lure quickly.

Egg Sinker: Weight that is shaped like an egg with a hole in the center.

Pyramid Sinker: Weight with three or four sides that comes in different sizes and is used to keep bait on the bottom in waves and currents.



Egg Sinker



Split Shot



Pyramid Sinker

Float or Bobber: Float that bobs at the surface and indicates a fish is biting the hook when pulled underwater. They may have weights that make a popping sound to attract fish.

Popping Cork: Float that has weights and beads. When the float is jerked, it makes a popping sound that attracts fish.



Float or Bobber



Popping Cork

Fishing Lures and Bait

Several bait options are available when saltwater fishing, including artificial and natural baits. The type of bait to choose depends on your targeted species, bait availability and personal preference. Remember, fish find food by detecting scent, sound and movement.

Artificial Lures – Imitate the colors, shapes, sounds or scents of baitfish.

Spoon: A dished-out or elongated spoon shape causes them to have a wobbling or darting motion in the water. The metallic finish provides a flashing effect to attract fish.



Plug: Constructed from hollow plastic or wood to resemble baitfish or other prey. They have one to three treble hooks. One or two sets of treble hooks may be removed to make it easier to unhook fish. These lures can be fished at almost any depth and some are made to float, dive or both. Includes: crankbaits, jerkbaits, surface plugs, floating or diving plugs, rattling plugs and poppers.



Soft Body Lure: Molded from soft plastic and made to imitate natural bait. They come in countless shapes, colors and lengths and may be fitted onto a jig head. Some soft body lures come pre-rigged with a jig head.



Natural Baits – Usually preferred by fish, but can be difficult to catch and maintain. Natural bait can also be purchased. REMINDER: Circle hooks are recommended when fishing with natural baits.

Live Bait

Shrimp: Insert a circle hook through the head and avoid dark spots in order to keep the shrimp alive; effective near the bottom or midwater using a float rig.

Crabs: Insert a circle hook up through back corner of shell, near swimmerets, or cut the body into halves or quarters; work well for bottom fishing.



Baitfish: Insert a circle hook across the “nose” of the fish, upward through the top of the mouth, or through the back of the fish, just in front of the dorsal fin. Common baitfish include ballyhoo, bonito, pinfish, pigfish, mullet and killifish.

Florida Sea Grant



Cut Bait

Squid: Sold frozen and can be cut into pieces; works well for bottom fishing.



Fish: Cut fish into strips or chunks and attach to hook, using the smallest pieces possible to avoid losing the bait.



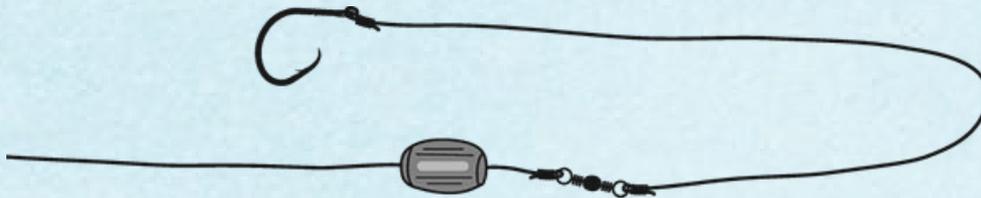
Fishing Rigs

There are several different fishing rigs that you can learn to make yourself, or you can opt to purchase rigs that have been manufactured and are ready to use. Here are a few important rigs that can be used in a variety of settings.

Slip-Sinker or Fish-Finder Rig: Designed to hold your bait right where you place it on the bottom, whether by casting or dropping. Once the egg sinker reaches bottom, your bait is able to move around. This rig can successfully catch all kinds of fish, freshwater and saltwater alike.

Supplies Needed: Fishing line, leader, egg sinker, swivel, hook and bait

Directions: First, slide an egg sinker onto the fishing line, then attach a swivel using an improved clinch or uni-knot. Next, tie the leader to the other eye on the swivel. Finally, tie the desired hook at the end of the leader.

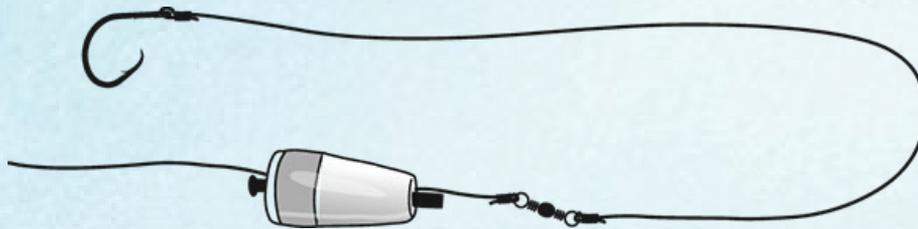


Slip-Sinker or Fish-Finder Rig

Float Rig: Used when targeting fish that feed away from the bottom. It has a float added to the main line above the swivel; this helps hold the line up and also helps reduce the erratic action of the rig.

Supplies Needed: Fishing line, float, leader, swivel, hook, bait and split shot

Directions: If the float does not have a quick-attachment mechanism, slide the fishing line through the float, then slide the plastic securing pin into the float. Tie a swivel on the end of the line, then attach a leader with hook to the other eye on the swivel. Adjust the float to the desired height above the bait. Split shot may be added to weigh-down the bait.

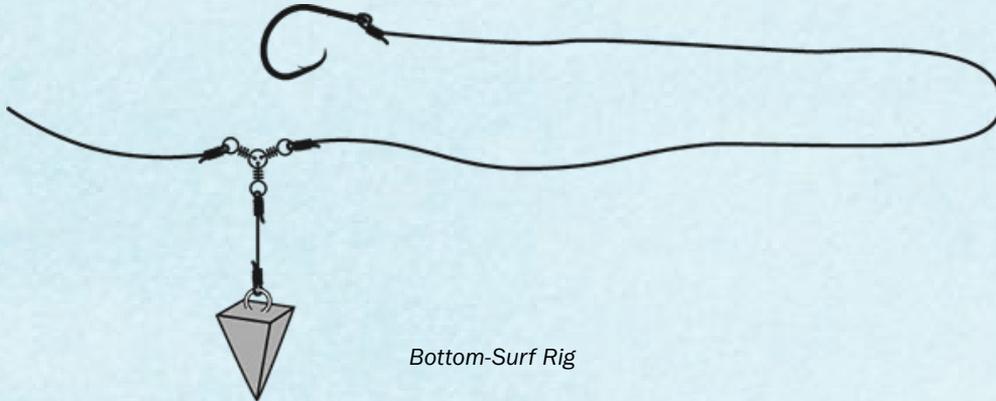


Float Rig

Bottom-Surf Rig: Designed to hold your bait right where you place it on the bottom. The pyramid sinker maintains the rig's position, while the bait is suspended just over the bottom. This rig works well with both live and cut bait.

Supplies Needed: Fishing line, leader, pyramid sinker, three-way swivel, hook and bait

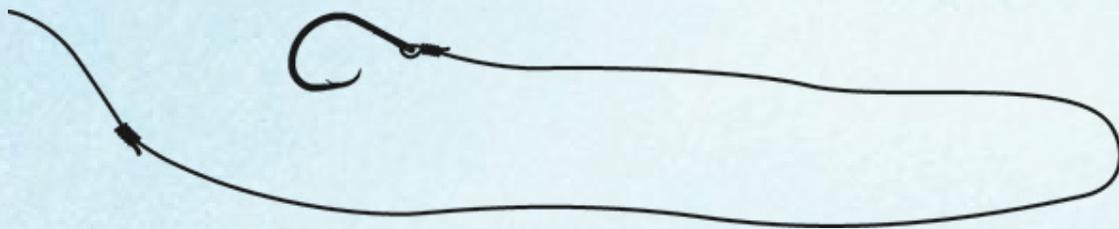
Directions: First, tie a short piece of leader to one of the eyes on the three-way swivel, then attach a pyramid sinker to the other end of the leader. Next, tie a long piece of leader to another eye on the three-way swivel, then tie a circle hook to the end of the leader. Finally, tie your fishing line to the last open spot on the three-way swivel.



Live-Lining or Live Bait Rig: Used when targeting species such as tarpon, snook, sailfish and dolphinfish. The rig allows live bait to be suspended in the water column without any weight.

Supplies Needed: Fishing line, leader, circle hook and live bait

Directions: Tie a piece of leader to a piece of fishing line using an albright special knot. Then, tie a circle hook to the end of the leader. Finally, attach your choice of live bait to the hook.



How to Fillet a Fish

Items needed: Sharp fillet knife, plastic cutting board or fish cleaning table, container for fillets and knife sharpener

Note: Filleting techniques may differ for fish of various shapes.

Directions:

1. Place the fish on the cutting board. Grasp the fish's mouth, then take the knife and position it just behind the pectoral fin. Slice downward about a half inch, keeping the rear of the knife blade up (watch your fingers!) until you feel the knife hit the spine. Be careful not to cut into the fish's backbone.
2. Turn the knife blade toward the tail and continue cutting, staying on top of the spine. You will feel resistance as you cut through the rib cage, but be careful not to cut into the backbone. It's better to cut too shallow than too deep. Continue your cut toward the tail, almost cutting the scaly fillet off, but not quite.
3. With the fillet barely attached to the tail, flip it away from the fish. Position your knife onto the narrow portion of the fillet closest to the tail. While holding the fish, slice the meat from the fish's skin. To obtain the maximum meat, cut very close to the skin; but if you want a less "fishy" taste, cut only the upper white meat from the skin, leaving the red meat attached.
4. Flip the fish over and fillet the other side, repeating steps 1 through 3.
5. With the tip of your fillet knife, carefully cut out the rib cage of each fillet. To retrieve the most meat, angle your knife and slice close to the ribs.
6. Carefully rinse and dry the fillets and eat them the same day, if possible. Avoid freezing fish for long durations and always check with the Department of Health for consumption advisories and fish handling tips.



Safety First

Sunscreen: Buy sunscreen that blocks UVA and UVB rays. You need more sun protection during the middle of the day. If you plan on getting in the water, you may want to use a waterproof sunscreen. Sunscreen doesn't last all day so remember to reapply product liberally to all parts of your body that will be exposed to sunlight.



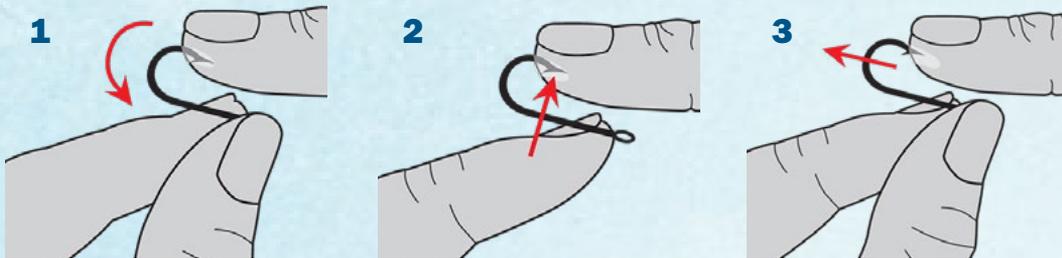
Polarized Sunglasses: They protect your eyes from UVA and UVB rays, help reduce glare and stop unwanted reflections that might hinder vision. They also provide better contrast, which enables visual clarity while fishing.



Hook Removal: Always seek medical attention after being wounded by a hook, especially for hooks embedded in the eye, face, ear, neck and any tissue other than skin; special care or anesthesia may be needed. Below are common suggestions for removing hooks.

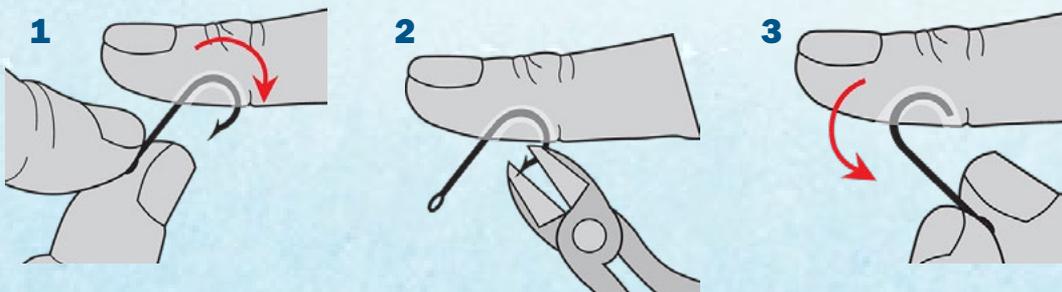
Hook impaled in shallow skin (retrograde technique):

1. Turn the hook so the shaft is parallel to the skin.
2. Hold the shaft and push up to disengage the barb.
3. Continue pushing up on the shaft as you back the hook out of the wound.
4. Apply pressure to the wound and seek immediate medical attention.



Hook impaled past the barb deeply into skin (advance and cut technique):

1. Carefully push the hook the rest of the way through your skin until the barb is visible.
2. Use a pair of pliers with wire cutters to cut the barb off the hook.
3. Pull the remaining piece of the hook out from where it entered the skin.
4. Apply pressure to both sides of the wound and seek immediate medical attention.



Marine Animal Injuries:

Below are common injuries that may occur while fishing in saltwater areas. There are several ways to avoid injury while on the water, but here are methods to ease pain if these issues are encountered.

Always seek medical attention after any sting or injury!

Jellyfish: Stings come from cells called nematocysts found on long tentacles that trail the jellyfish, and even on the body itself in some species.

- 1. Get out of the water** - Jellyfish tentacles may still be on your skin and the tentacles are capable of stinging anyone if bare skin comes in contact with them. The tentacles even sting after they've been ripped from the body of the jellyfish.
- 2. Rinse the tentacles off** - Rinse away the tentacles using hot water if possible. If heated water is not available, use saltwater rather than freshwater, as freshwater may worsen the stinging pain. Keep sand out of the wound.
- 3. Peel off the tentacles** - Remove any remaining tentacles with a gloved hand, edge of an ID card, stick, shell or tweezers. Applying vinegar or a paste of baking soda and water may also help remove the tentacles. Avoid rubbing the area with a towel.
- 4. Relieve discomfort** - Ice packs, over-the-counter pain relievers, anti-histamines or medicated creams may help relieve discomfort.

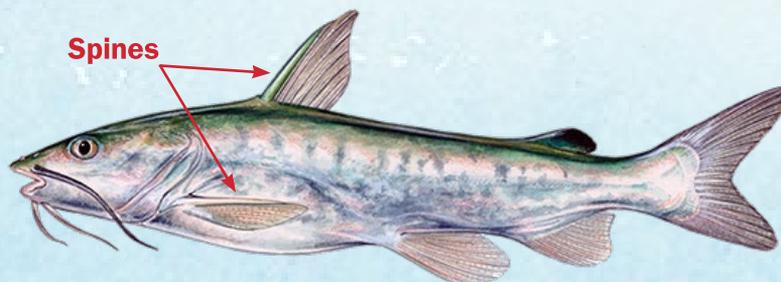


Catfish: Injuries come from three spines found on the front of the dorsal and pectoral fins (NOT from the whiskers or barbels found near the mouth of catfish). The tips of these spines are very sharp and injuries occur when they puncture the skin. Be especially careful with little catfish that have smaller, sharper spines.

- 1. Clean the wound** - Use tweezers to remove any spines, then clean and rinse the wound.
- 2. Submerge wound in hot water** - Use the hottest water you can stand to help alleviate pain; over-the-counter medications may also help.
- 3. Monitor the wound** - Keep the area clean and be sure to keep the wound dry and uncovered. Seek medical attention as soon as you are able.

Avoid catfish injuries:

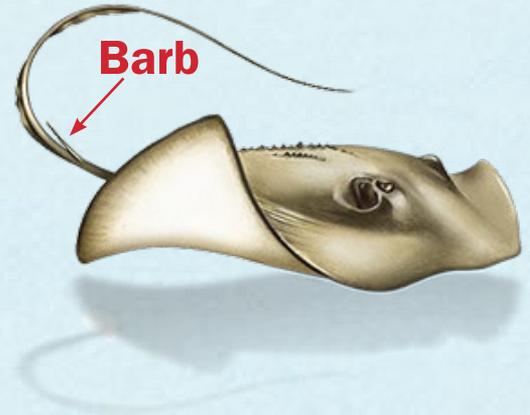
- When using dehooking tools, be sure to use a downward pop over the water instead of flipping the fish; flipping the fish can cause it to fly back toward you.
- You can also use a lip grip device to handle catfish safely.



Location of spines on a catfish

Stingrays: Painful stings come from one or more barbs found near the middle of the whip-like tail. Stingrays are not usually aggressive, but will sting in self-defense when accidentally stepped on or frightened. Shuffle your feet through sand, rather than taking steps, to help scare the stingray away.

- 1. Bathe wound in seawater** - While still in the water, irrigate the wound to remove debris and fragments of spine and tissue; use tweezers if necessary.
- 2. Get out of the water** - Then dry area carefully with a clean towel.
- 3. Stop the bleeding** - Apply direct pressure at or slightly above the wound if it is bleeding.
- 4. Immerse wound in hot water** - Heat inactivates any remaining venom and may help relieve pain. Even a hot boat deck can help reduce pain.
- 5. Monitor the wound** - Keep the area clean using soap and water, and be sure to keep the wound dry and uncovered. Seek medical attention as soon as you are able.



Seek immediate medical attention if your injury causes hives, itching, shortness of breath, wheezing, tightening of the throat, flushed skin, weakness, dizziness, lightheadedness, fainting, loss of consciousness, sweating, elevated heart rate, decreased blood pressure, excess blood loss, rapid breathing, headache, palpitations, muscle cramps or seizures.

Remedies to AVOID: Urine, meat tenderizer, solvents and pressure bandages

**Always seek medical attention after any sting or injury!
For more information, contact the National Poison Control Center
at 800-222-1222.**