



If a shark really wants to attack, you'll need to kick and punch hard.

Survive a shark attack

» Shark attacks on humans are extremely rare, but should it ever happen, you need to know what to do. By Mark Carwardine

Over the years, I've spent an inordinate amount of time diving and snorkelling with sharks. But I've never been bitten. The likelihood of being harmed by one of the most feared animals on the planet is very small indeed. Millions of people paddle, swim, snorkel, dive and surf in the sea every day but, in a typical year, fewer than 100 are bumped, nipped or bitten by sharks. In contrast, 100 to 150 million sharks are killed each year by people.

It is thought that three species account for more than half of all attacks: the great white, tiger and bull sharks. The vast majority of species have never been implicated in any attack. While a few large sharks will eat people given the chance, and many species bite in self-defence, most attacks are cases of mistaken identity. The shark bites once, typically in poor visibility, realises its error and swims away.

WHAT TO DO

If a shark begins to show too much interest or looks unhappy, the best response is to stay close to your friends and move away slowly. Keep calm, don't splash about and avoid rapid or exaggerated movements.

If the shark persists, it may be

possible to push it away with a gloved hand, camera or stick. Some experts recommend a blow on the snout while others suggest swimming hard and fast towards the shark, but such displays of aggression could be interpreted as provocative. If the shark is actually attacking, the only option is to fight back – punch and kick hard, and poke it in the eyes.

Of course, it's better to avoid an attack in the first place. That means following a few guidelines and ensuring that you have a rapid means of exit, either into a boat or onto dry land.

BITE-SIZED TIPS

- » Don't wear shiny jewellery or high-contrast or bright colours (yellow, rightly or wrongly, has been dubbed 'yum-yum yellow' by shark scientists).
- » Stay out of the water if bleeding or menstruating.
- » Snorkel or dive in groups – a shark is more likely to attack a solitary individual.
- » Keep out of the water during darkness or twilight, when many sharks are more active.
- » Avoid murky water. Sharks can struggle to distinguish between human limbs and natural prey.
- » Don't visit New Smyrna Beach, Florida, which has more attacks than anywhere else in the world.