



Avoid a **BEAR HUG**

TO SURVIVE AN ENCOUNTER
WITH A BEAR, KNOW YOUR BEAR

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Additional Photography Courtesy Colorado Parks and Wildlife

You're out in the wilderness, enjoying the quiet, the scenery and the fresh air. Suddenly, you see it. About 100 feet away stands a beast that weighs hundreds of pounds and has razor-sharp teeth that could cut into your flesh like butter. The bear's big, black eyes lock on yours and you know: What you do next could determine whether you live or die.

So, what do you do? According to experts, it often depends on the type of bear.

BLACK BEARS

"Black bears are not aggressive bears," says Jerry Apker, carnivore biologist at Colorado Parks and Wildlife. "It's very rare for them to behave aggressively and, when they do, it's possibly about food and sometimes about young, although I think that tends to be overblown."

The black bear researcher says he doesn't have experience with grizzlies but believes grizzlies are more aggressive. The smaller bears with a pointed dog-like face and one-to-two-inch front claws tend to respond to fear by running or climbing a tree, Apker says; grizzlies may respond by charging.

Male black bears (male bears are larger than females) tend to weigh less than 300 pounds, although exceptionally large male black bears can reach 600 pounds. They range in height from about two to three feet at the shoulders. They live in forested areas in North America. Despite the name, black bears can have black, brown, cinnamon or even blond fur.

These bears tend to be more active in the fall, because they go into a "feeding frenzy" to put on weight, enabling them to survive winter. During this time they tend to be active from 20 to 22 hours per day; during summertime they tend to feed between dawn and dusk, Apker says. He recommends being aware of your surroundings if you're in bear territory and, if you see a black bear, make sure it knows you're there, too. You don't want to surprise it.

"As with mountain lions, with black bears, too, you can prompt a sort of predatory response in an animal that's running away from you." Instead, face the bear and, when you can, glance behind you to see where you're going as you back away slowly.

"For black bears, I think you do want to assert dominance," Apker says. "If you know you're in black bear country and that's all there is, I think asserting a demeanor that says 'I'm the most dangerous animal in this situation and you want to get away from me as much as I want to get away from you and if we get in a fight you're going to lose.'"

Apker says black bears tend to be submissive but, just like people, bears' personalities can differ; you may encounter some bears more aggressive than others. If a black bear charges you, stand your ground.

"Chances are it's going to be a bluff charge and the bear will either veer away at the last moment or will stop anywhere between 10 to 15 to 20 feet out and will stop and be huffing,



Though black bears are not normally aggressive bears, any animal, if properly provoked, will become aggressive in a moment's notice, black bears included.

[LEFT] For black bears, asserting dominance gives you a good chance to survive an encounter.

which is kind of a whoofing sound, and it just means they're upset and are aggravated by your presence and are trying to assess your intentions."

He recommends using bear spray, or pepper spray as a back up. And be careful the wind doesn't blow it back on you. But what if, after standing your ground, using spray and whatever else, the bear still attacks?

"I've never been a believer of the lay down and play dead scenario," Apker says. "I've always believed in a situation like that you want to fight back for your life with the mindset 'This is either going to be the bear or me.'"

"With black bears, I say you fight, fight, fight, with whatever means you have," he says. "Sticks, pocketknives, ballpoint pens. You can stick it in its eye. You want to do whatever you can to survive."

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[ABOVE] Grizzly bears can be as much as 850 pounds and can run 40 miles per hour.

[TOP RIGHT] The best method of survival is to freeze in your tracks, slowly outstretch your arms and begin to speak calmly to the bear. Whatever you do, don't fight back.

[RIGHT] If attacked by a grizzly it is time to curl up on the ground and play dead.

[OPPOSITE, TOP] Polar bears are the largest bear and some can be more than 1,700 pounds. To avoid a polar bear attack, it is best not to be seen by them.

BROWN/GRIZZLY BEARS

The heaviest male brown bears, also referred to as grizzly bears, weigh as much as 850 pounds and stand tall, as high as three to four feet at the shoulders. They can be found in living in forests, meadows and arctic tundra. They live in North America, Western Canada, Alaska, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho and Washington, according to Defenders of Wildlife.

These concave-faced bears range in color from blond to black. Larger than black bears, with longer front claws that are two to four inches long, grizzlies also can be distinguished by the large shoulder hump.

"The most important thing probably hiking in grizzly country is to stay alert... to learn a little bit about the bears," says Doug Peacock, grizzly bear advocate and author of *Grizzly Years: In Search of the American Wilderness* (Holt Paperbacks) among other grizzly and wilderness-related books.

Peacock says grizzlies tend to feed at night and sleep during the day, and that most grizzly maulings are caused by humans who are too close to mothers with cubs.

Similar to Apker's advice, Peacock recommends those in areas where bears may be to keep a lookout for bears, and to stay away from carcasses a bear may be protecting as food.

So, what do you do if you see a bear?

"First of all, freeze," he says. "Don't jerk, don't move. The second thing I do is turn my head to the side and I stretch my arms out... and after a while I might just speak very quietly to the bear to show that I'm a human being and that I'm calm."



Don't run. A grizzly can run 40 miles an hour. Even if you're an Olympic athlete you can't outrun it.

Peacock knows someone who shouted from 200 feet away and was charged after.

After running, he says, "the second worst thing you can do is yell. 'You have to stand your ground and not move when the bears are charging.'" Although he's been charged, Peacock has never been attacked. If he were attacked, though, he wouldn't fight back. "I would curl up on the ground at the last moment," he says. "Hit the ground, protect your head and neck and play dead."

Peacock says the bear will likely hit you once in the neck and, if you're not perceived as a threat, lose interest.

"Don't get up right away," he says. "You might have to wait 45 minutes because that mother grizzly might be watching and if you move, she might just get up and maul you again."



POLAR BEARS

Polar bears live in arctic and sea-ice areas in Alaska, Canada, Russia, Greenland and Norway. Standing on two feet, adult males can be as tall as eight to nine feet and weigh 700 to 1,300 pounds, some reaching as much as more than 1,700 pounds.

"Polar bears are predators and should always be treated as dangerous," according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's safety guidelines on polar bears.

It's best to not be seen by a polar bear by avoiding them altogether. Steer clear of whale or other marine carcasses a bear might be protecting as food.

Travel in groups and never chase or try to herd or separate polar bears. If the bear stops to sniff the air, sway, or lower its head below its shoulders with ears pressed back, it may be aware of your presence. If the bear feels threatened, it likely will huff or snap its jaws together. It may also make eye contact with the threat.

If you are in the bear's path, or between a mother and cubs, get out of the way.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife website, "if the animal continues to approach and you are near a vehicle, leave the area. If no vehicle is available, do not run; slowly move to a safe shelter. If no safe shelter is available, stand your ground. Gather people together in a group and/or hold a jacket over your head to look bigger. If the bear continues to approach, shout or make noise."

Fight back, unless it's an attack by a mother defending her cubs. If that's the case, remove yourself as a threat to the cubs instead. **ADD**

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URBAN BEARS

In all situations where bears are nearby, you want to make sure food is properly packaged and not in a position that would draw attention. You also don't want food near your tent, if you're camping.

But, what would you do if you saw a bear hanging out on your deck, or worse, in your living room? Carl Lackey, game biologist at the Nevada Department of Wildlife, calls bears that are habituated to people "urban bears." "They are very bold and comfortable in human settings," says Lackey, who deals with black bears in Nevada. "If you wave your arms, the bear just looks at you like, 'Hey, you're disturbing the peace. Be quiet.'"

People who live in forested areas with bears nearby are at risk (especially if they don't have bear-resistant trashcans), along with those who plant fruit trees in their yards. These bears are not afraid of people, generally, because they've had positive experiences such as people taking pictures or feeding them.



Despite this, surviving an urban bear encounter calls for similar action as any other black bear.

"Remain facing the bear and try to back away to somewhere safe," Lackey says, noting that you should yell at the bear or speak in a loud voice.

Lackey and the Nevada Department of Wildlife combat urban bear complications through its Karelian Bear Dog Program. The program selects and trains Karelians to work with bear-management workers and people living in bear territory.

"The dogs haze and harass the bears, and the idea is to modify that behavior so they're not so comfortable around people."

Lackey says the bears don't want trouble any more than we do, but people should still be cautious.

"You have to treat them with respect," he said.

"Because even black bears can be very dangerous and black bears do kill people."