

Emergency Tarp Shelters

Here are two reliable emergency tarp shelters commonly used when providing **first aid** to a patient in the backcountry. Both emphasize **speed, protection, and access** for patient care.

1. Lean-To Medical Shelter

Best for: Quick access to the patient, moderate winds, light precipitation.

Why it works: Creates a protected workspace while keeping one full side open for assessment, treatment, and monitoring.

How to set it up:

- Run a ridgeline low and tight between two trees (or trekking poles if above tree line).
- Secure the tarp's **back edge** to a ridgeline.
- Stake or tie the **bottom edge** to the ground, creating a sloped roof.
- Orient the back wall **toward the wind** to block exposure.
- Add an insulated pad, packs, or groundsheet under the patient to reduce heat loss.

Advantages:

- Fast to pitch.
- Open front allows rescuers to work easily.
- Good for maintaining verbal contact with the patient.



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2. A-Frame Shelter Over the Patient

Best for: Rain, snow, or cold; when the patient needs full overhead protection.

Why it works: Provides 360° weather protection while still allowing side access.

How to set it up:

- Run a **ridgeline** low and tight between two trees (or trekking poles if above treeline).
- Drape the tarp evenly over the line to form an A-shape.
- Stake out both sides.
- Leave one end **partially open** for ventilation and responder access.

Advantages:

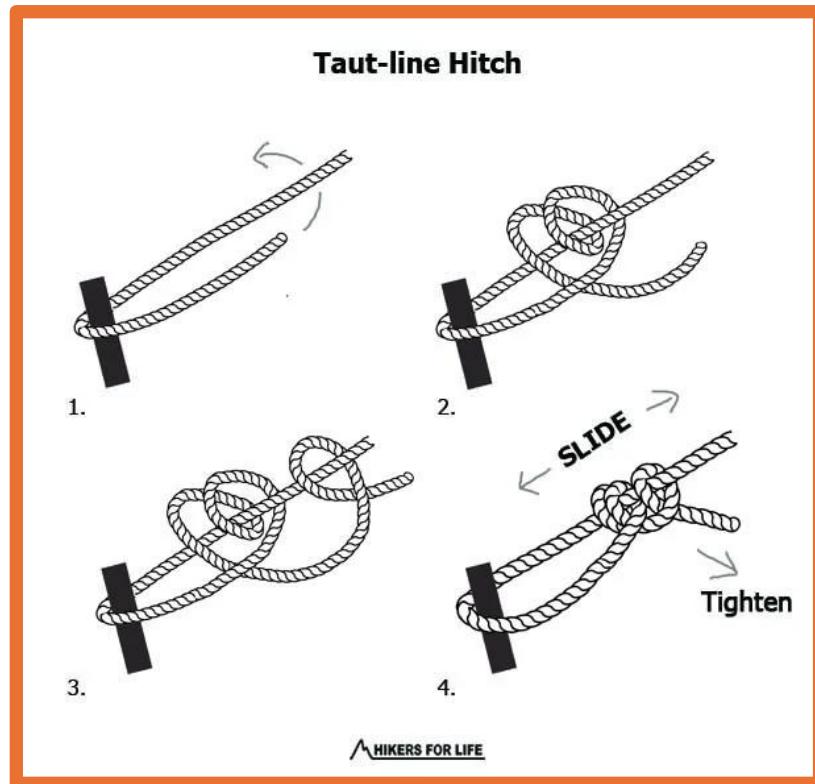
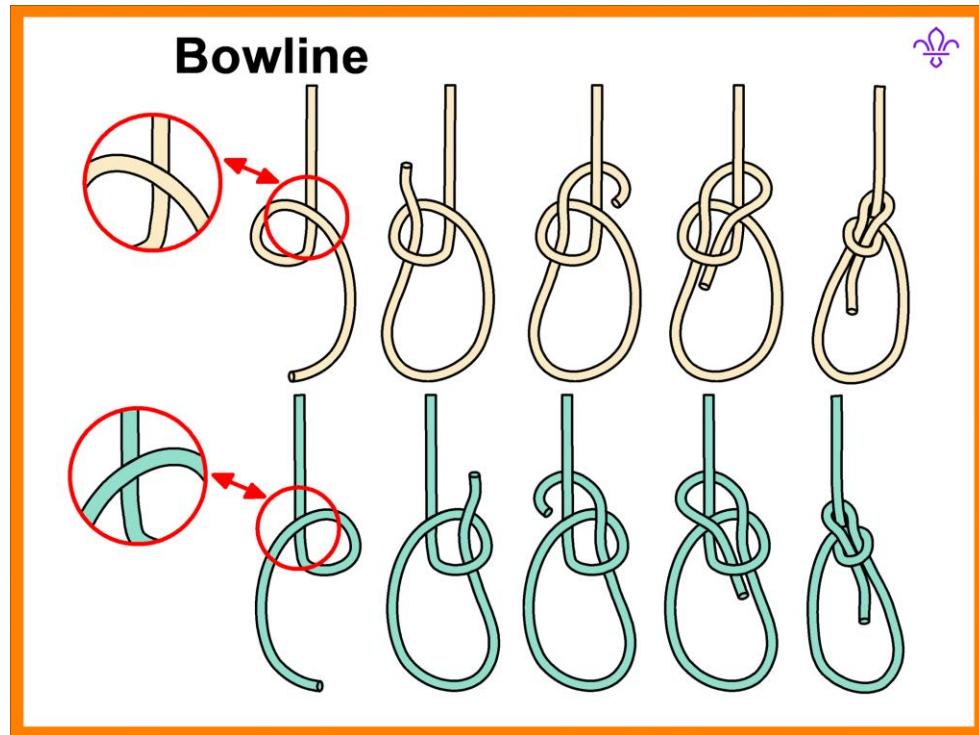
- Excellent for rain, heavy snow, or hypothermia management.
- Encloses the patient's body heat while keeping them dry.
- Works well for longer treatment periods or while waiting for help.



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Important Knots

The bowline knot is useful to attach to the tarp, while the taut-line hitch provides adjustable tensioning when attached to a stake.



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Useful Videos

[Poncho Shelter: The Basic Lean-to](#)

[Poncho Shelter: A Frame](#)

Orange is Preferred

Orange is one of the most **visible and contrasting colors** in natural environments. It stands out against snow, forest canopy, rock, and alpine terrain far better than greens, blues, or browns. Search-and-rescue (SAR) teams often look for flashes of **high-visibility orange** from the air. Even for people with color vision deficiencies, signal orange remains one of the best choices for emergency tarps because of brightness, contrast, and universal SAR standards, not because the hue itself is seen perfectly.