

Off the Hook!



You're not alone if you think unhooking a fish can be tricky. Some fish have tough skin around their mouth. Sometimes fish get hooked in an awkward spot. Lures with multiple hooks (like treble hooks) can seem impossible to remove!

Before you go fishing, find a sturdy pair of pliers for your tackle box. Use the pliers to squeeze the barb down on each hook. Barbs are designed to help keep fish hooked. Removing the barb, or squeezing it down, makes removing the hook easier.

You might think that barbless hooks mean you're hooking and reeling in fewer fish. But if you're careful about how you set the hook and reel in the fish, you'll find that you don't lose many fish.

Removing a hook quickly from a fish is one important part to releasing fish. Another important part is keeping the fish safe during its release. The law states you must immediately return a fish unharmed if it is caught out of season, if it is too small, or if catching it puts you over the daily creel limit. That means you must work quickly and carefully! Use these guidelines to get the job done.

- Land the fish quickly. Don't let it fight and jump until it's exhausted. Increase the drag on your reel and make sure your fishing line is in good condition.

- Keep the fish in the water as long as possible. Try not to bring the fish onto land where it can flop around on the ground.

- Handle the fish as little as possible. Quickly remove the hook. Practice grabbing the hook shank and turning the hook upside down. Usually the fish will slide off the hook. If not, give it a gentle shake.

- If you must handle the fish, make sure your hands are wet before you touch the fish.

- Sometimes a fish will get hooked deeply and there's no way to get the hook out. Just snip the line as close as possible to the fish's mouth. Then release the fish. The fish has a good chance of surviving.

- Return the fish gently to the water as soon as possible. Remember that "unharmed" is the key word.

- Give the fish a few seconds to "shake it off." Then, if the fish doesn't swim away, gently move it back and forth in the water. This helps it get a fresh dose of oxygen by moving water over its gills.

