



FIGHT BACK

Gator attacks on divers are extremely rare, but Ike Monreal is living proof that it can happen. If you dive in gator country, here's how to survive:

1. USE SCUBA GEAR Gators try to drag their prey underwater to drown it. If you only have a snorkel, you're at a great disadvantage. "I knew I had half a tank left—about an hour's worth of air," Monreal says. "I was gonna fight 'til that tank ran out."

2. BE PREPARED Wear heavy layers of neoprene. Monreal was wearing three wetsuits, and doctors say this helped limit the damage significantly. And carry a knife strapped to the front of your BC where you can reach it with either hand.

3. AIM FOR THE EYES It's the softest spot on the gator. Use your finger, knife, anything you can get your hands on, and jam it in hard. The nostrils and ears are also sensitive spots, and poking or smacking the snout or the side of the head may also prompt a release.

4. GO WITH THE ROLL A gator's death roll is meant to twist off bite-sized chunks of flesh. Unless you see an opportunity to put your feet down and stop the roll somehow, hold on and roll with the gator.

5. FIGHT THE INFECTION Once you escape, the first priority is to put any floating limbs on ice and get to a hospital for reattachment. And while you're there, make sure you get shot up with hardcore antibiotics. Gators feast on rotting flesh, and their mouths are full of dangerous bacteria. The fight's not over until you beat the infection.

SURVIVOR

Alligator vs. Diver

Know what to do when an alligator attacks underwater? Ike Monreal survived, and you can too.

Dwight "Ike" Monreal has dived for golf balls professionally in the water hazards of Florida golf courses for 14 years. Gators have always been par for the course. "All of us golf ball divers realize a nudge or nip once in a while is normal, especially during mating season from March to May," Monreal says. "And if you constantly come up to look for them, you'll never do any work." But on April 26, for the first time in his career, Monreal got more than just a nip. "I was in 5 to 6 feet of water when I was viciously, with all the force and velocity you can imagine, struck on the backside of my body up on the shoulder," he says. "I immediately realized that if I didn't keep absolute clarity, I was going to die there."

He estimates the gator's size at about 10 feet long and 450 pounds, but 62-year-old Monreal is 6 feet,

4 inches tall, 280 pounds, and he proved a worthy match for the hungry predator. "I looked at his head next to me, and I saw my arm floating out there. I said to myself, 'my God, I've lost my arm,'" he explains.

"When he dragged me back down, I said, 'God give me the strength,' and I slammed my thumb back in his eye socket, digging for his brain."

"That's when I jabbed my thumb into his eye socket. He went ballistic. He crunched down harder and death-rolled me." Monreal went with the roll, and when he popped out of the water briefly, he told himself death wasn't an option. "I prayed to God and I saw my family—my three boys and my wife—without a daddy," he says. "When he dragged me back down, I said, 'God give me the

strength,' and I slammed my thumb back in his eye socket, digging for his brain." When the gator tried to death-roll a second time, Monreal was ready for it. "I put my legs down halfway through the roll and got on top of him with my thumb in his eye. For the first time in the whole seven-minute attack, he let go because I was in control."

Golf course staff responded quickly, and emergency personnel rushed Monreal to St. Joseph's Hospital in Tampa. He had a dislocated

left shoulder, the rotator cuff and bicep muscle had separated from the bone, and his upper arm bone and the ball from his shoulder joint had snapped. "It'll be at least six months before I can even think about moving my shoulder normally," he says. "The thought of going back in the water...I have had some serious flashbacks. It's becoming a bit of a problem."
—TRAVIS MARSHALL