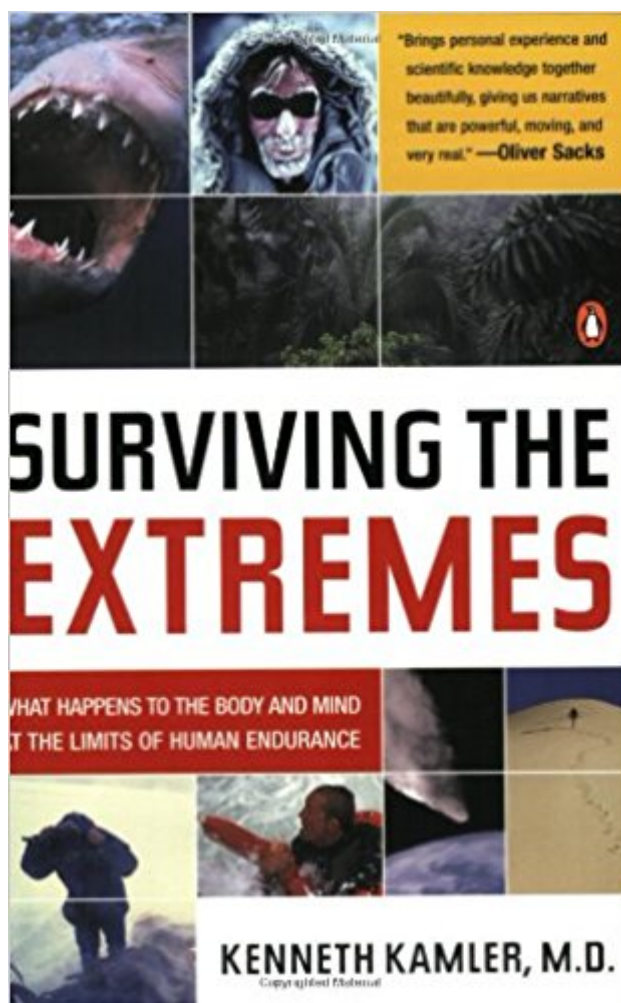


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# Surviving The Extremes: What Happens To The Body And Mind At The Limits Of Human Endurance



## Synopsis

"Surviving the Extremes brings personal experience and scientific knowledge together beautifully, giving us narrative that are powerful, moving, and very real." -Oliver Sacks  
A true-life scientific thriller no reader will forget, *Surviving the Extremes* takes us to the farthest reaches of the earth as well as into the uncharted territory within the human body, spirit, and brain. A vice president of the legendary Explorers Club, as well as surgeon, explorer, and masterful storyteller, Dr. Kenneth Kamler has spent years discovering what happens to the human body in extreme environmental conditions. Divided into six sections—jungle, high seas, desert, underwater, high altitude, and outer space—this book uses firsthand testimony and documented accounts to investigate the science of what a body goes through and explains why people survive—and why they sometimes don't.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Medical case studies can be fascinating to read, full of drama, heroism, and sometimes tragedy. Most doctors' tales take place in clinics or hospitals, but those pedestrian settings are not for Kenneth Kamler, who practices medicine outside, patching people up with surprising success under harrowing conditions. *Surviving the Extremes* starts with open-air surgery in the steamy jungles of the River, moves to disturbingly detailed descriptions of the many ways humans can die at sea, and from there takes white-knuckled readers through the rest of Earth's extreme environments. Krakauer fans will gasp at the book's best chapter, covering the high-altitude medical feats Kamler

has performed on Mt. Everest and other peaks. "No course in medical school taught me the proper mixture of oxygen, IV fluids, and Tibetan chants to treat a subdural hematoma in below-zero temperatures on a 3-mile-high glacier," Kamler writes. Instead, he has learned the fine art of adventure doctoring by doing it, and in the process, he's won fans among the world's most prominent risk-takers. Through it all, Kamler remains fascinated by the human body's ability to heal under horrifically dangerous conditions. His medical adventures are inspiring and thrilling, as well as occasionally bloody and disgusting. In short, perfect stories of human survival. --Therese Littleton

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Ever since Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, books about human survival have captured readers' imagination. Add this book to the list. Kamler is no office-room doctor, preferring to use his skills on survival missions. As he puts it in his prologue, "I practice medicine where I don't belong." He takes the reader along on his explorations—be they on the ice or on Mt. Everest. While on the former, he used his medical techniques to save locals; on the latter, he saved climbers, including some of those threatened during the ill-fated 1996 climb chronicled by Krakauer. But Kamler's book is far more than just a story of his own explorations. He uses his journey as a launching point for investigating the nature of survival. In a style reminiscent of Oliver Sacks, he details remarkable stories of human endurance in adverse conditions—adrift at sea in a raft, lost in an unknown desert—while simultaneously educating the reader in the science of survival. For Kamler, the secret lies in the brain, which provides the key to survival: "If the will is there, the brain initiates actions that are appropriate responses to the environmental stress." Even readers who aren't survivalists themselves will find their brains stimulated by Kamler's fluid writing and lively stories.

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*Surviving the Extremes* by Kenneth Kamler, M.D., is full of both riveting and interesting stories of the survival of the human body and how it adapts to and overcomes (and sometimes fails to overcome) extreme conditions. The book itself has six chapters stressing survival stories in the jungle, on the high seas, in the desert, underwater, at high altitude, and in outer space. Each chapter includes an amazing story of survival (and sometimes the lack of) paired with an analysis of the biological responses that each individual experienced. There is an apparent theme of the wonder of the human body and its survival capabilities. However, there is also an emphasis on the "x-factors" that play an important role in survival. Specifically,

Kamler stresses the so-called "will to survive" and how it was solely responsible for the survival of Beck Weathers in the Everest Tragedy of 1996. Simply put, this is a fun read. The stories are utterly gripping and the explanations are exceptionally interesting and educational. I personally loved the book because of Kamler's narrative ability to combine his scientific knowledge with exhilarating stories that push the human body to its limits. The educational elements would that appear in this book make it an excellent choice for any anatomy-related course or for anyone interested in the limits of the human body.

This book was packed with information about the diseases and conditions that affect the human body when exposed to adverse environments. The exploration of the impact of these environments on the human body was incredibly detailed and fascinating thus the book, for me, became a page-turner. Author Kenneth Kamler offers a graphic description of the various conditions that can affect humans exposed to environments which test their endurance. Being interested in medicine, this book was very alluring and honestly made me excited for the things I might explore in my future education. Kamler details afflictions like Pulmonary Edema, which affects people in extreme high altitudes. He explores its symptoms of "bubbling" sounding breathing, frothy mucus vomit, shallow breathing, coughing, and swollen/blue lips. His narrative allows you to understand how Pulmonary Edema affects people physiologically as pressure decreases with high altitude. Then, Kamler dives into treatment options such as descent and a variety of medications. Finally, once you have a comprehensive knowledge of the disease he continues to explain why it affects certain groups of people more than others, such as the fact that Sherpas, who because they continually travel to altitude, have developed, through the process of natural selection, enzymes which keep them more acclimated to altitude than newcomers or "lowlanders". Kamler's detailing of every aspect of these scenarios answers any question you might have about the conditions people face and truly paints a picture of the educational level a doctor must pursue to be successful in what they do. This book is jam packed with other examples of humans dealing with the impact of adverse environments. Every page is riveting and draws you to read on. For me, this book motivated me to learn so that I could bring myself to Kamler's level of knowledge. I would definitely recommend it to anyone regardless of their interest in medicine, as it is riveting to understand the limits of the human body and how it can continue to surprise us. In true Ethnographic style it immerses the reader into the world of a doctor, and allows full comprehension of the knowledge they must possess and the situations they are faced with. The book brings excitement and education

to the same level to allow you this insight. I would rate this book about an 8.5/10.

Although I have no desire to be an explorer, it was amazing to read about the human body at its most extreme limits. This book is written very well and although it is very scientific, all of the concepts are accessible. I've been recommending this book to pretty much everyone I know: those who dream of adventure, those who dream of science, and those who would appreciate how very complicated and strong our bodies, and most especially, our minds are.

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