

Preparing for a Hike

Here's a short list of essential things you should do or take with you to ensure all of your hikes are both safe and pleasant.

- **Eat a good breakfast.** It's true: Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. A morning meal that includes hot cereal, like oatmeal or Cream of Wheat, will provide carbohydrates for energy on the trail. Keep your energy level up throughout the day by sipping water and nibbling on fruits and nuts.
- **Tell someone where you're going** and when you expect to return. Let family or friends know your hiking plans. If you're overdue, rescuers will know where to look for you. Posting your itinerary on your car in the trailhead parking lot can be an invitation to thieves, and isn't advised.
- **Bring rain gear.** A good light weight rain suit (both jacket and pants) or poncho should always stay in your pack. Weather can be very changeable, particularly in the Spring and Fall.
- **Bring a compass and map.** A compass is an invaluable navigational tool. Practice with it, so you'll know how to use it in an emergency.
- **Bring a light source.** Flashlights or headlamps are essential gear, even if you don't plan on being out after dark. Pop an ankle or wander off trail and, suddenly, your quick hike can take a lot more time. Toss in a back-up flashlight and an extra set of fresh batteries to be truly prepared.
- **Bring a first aid kit.** Simple stuff does the trick. Adhesive bandages, adhesive tape, gauze, a small squeeze bottle to irrigate wounds, antibiotic ointment, and pain relievers are the basics. Also, a bandanna works as a cravat bandage or a sling.
- **Bring plenty of water.** Nobody drinks enough water. And, you need lots when you're exercising. Two quarts per person per day is recommended. Your body functions better when you're well-hydrated, and you feel better, too. Two quarts a day keeps dehydration away.

- **Carry out what you carry in.** There's no trash pick-up in the backcountry, so footprints are all you should leave behind.
- **Don't forget the duct tape.** In the backcountry, duct tape is a repair kit on a roll. Wind a few feet around your hiking pole and it'll always be close at hand. A hole in your canoe or a tear in your tent are no fun, but a bit of duct tape can save the day. If you can't fix it with duct tape, it probably wasn't broken to begin with.
- **Stop and smell the flowers.** The summit view you're aiming for is just one part of the hike. The journey to get there holds just as many rewards if we slow down and enjoy them. And, if you have room in your pack, don't forget your camera.