



Hiking Safety

WEEK 12: 10 AUGUST, 2020

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

In many places across the country, summer is a great time for hiking. With kids out of school, people taking vacation, and days lasting longer, more and more people are hitting the trails – both seasoned veterans and newcomers. Whether you've been hiking your entire life or you're just starting out, there are precautions you should take while hiking to avoid potentially dangerous situations.

Perhaps the biggest mistake is not planning adequately for a hike. So often, hikers will anticipate the entry hike without taking into full account the return hike, even if it is mainly downhill. Not preparing for changing weather can be life-threatening, along with miscalculation of daylight and then hiking in the dark without a flashlight. The greatest enemies of a tired, inadequately prepared hiker are: panic; confusion; and lack of action. Here's the truth—most hikers, even experienced ones, spend too much time and energy worrying about the scary—but low percentage threats like bears, mountain lions and poisonous snakes and not enough time concerning themselves with the dull

but common dangers like germs, blisters and hypothermia. Don't overestimate your abilities. Take the time to ask yourself before you go:

What is my experience level with hiking? Do I go hiking often or is this my first time hitting the trails?

How much equipment, food, and water (weight) can I comfortably carry in a backpack? How long can I carry a backpack with all the essentials?

Am I physically fit for the hike I would like to do? Have I practiced hiking up and down steep hills or am I more comfortable on flat, paved paths?

Have I ever hiked in this type of environment before? Environmental conditions such as temperature and humidity take time to get used to, especially if you live in a different environment from the park you are visiting.



Am I able to go to higher elevations? More effort is required to hike at higher elevations due to the reduced amount of oxygen available in the air. Remember that at 8,000 feet you are at risk of altitude illness, a potentially life-threatening condition.

Am I hiking alone or do I plan to bring a friend? It is safer to hike with a companion, but if you prefer go solo, take extra measures to ensure that you are prepared since you will be traveling alone.

PLAN YOUR HIKE

Your safety is your responsibility while hiking. Planning is an important step in being prepared and ready for your adventure.

- Pick a trail that everyone can successfully complete and enjoy safely. Learn the trail and bring a map if possible. If you're planning on going off the trail, learn how to use a compass and bring it along with a good quality map.
- Complete a trip plan that details where you will be walking or hiking, your contact information, when you plan to arrive and return, and who is coming with you. Leave this information with a trusted friend or family member that is not going on the trip with you.
- Develop an emergency plan for what to do if you or your hiking companions becomes lost or injured. Consider learning CPR and basic wilderness first aid, especially if

you're planning to hike in the backcountry. Consider packing survival gear. Especially if you're planning a long hike in unpopulated areas.

- Have a way to communicate. Do not rely on your cell phone because there may not be cellular coverage on the trail. Consider having a personal locator beacon.
- Check the weather before you head out on your hike. If conditions are not ideal, don't take the chance! Be prepared to seek shelter if you encounter severe weather and know what to do in case of lightning or flash flooding.
- Check for trail closures, wildland fire risks, or other hazards that are in the area.
- If you plan to hike in higher altitudes than you are used to, take extra time to get used to the new heights. Make sure to get good sleep, drink lots of water, and do not overexert yourself.

IF YOU GET LOST HIKING

If you do find yourself lost, follow the **STOP** recommendation by the US Forest Service.

Stop As soon as you realize you are lost. Stay calm and don't panic.

Think Retrace your steps in your mind. What landmarks did you see? Do you have any photos that will help you find your way back?

Observe If you are on a trail, stay on the trail. If you have a compass, use it to better understand your location. As a last resort, follow a stream downhill. This could be dangerous, but will typically lead to a road or trail.

Plan Make a plan. If you are not confident in this plan, stay put until you have a solid route in mind. If it is after dark and/or you are very tired, it is likely best to stay put until morning. Sunrise always lends itself to clearer thinking and rational

WHAT TO BRING ON A HIKE

When you plan your hike, you'll need to make decisions on what to wear and what to bring with you. A 3-mile easy hike on a well-traveled trail in San Diego is much different than a full-day hike in Joshua Tree National Park but some items are still considered essential, such as good footwear, sunscreen, etc. Here is a list of 10 items to consider bringing when planning your hike:

1. Appropriate footwear. For a short hike on easy trails or pavement, tennis shoes are ok. For longer hikes, carrying heavier loads, or more technical terrain, hiking boots offer more support.
2. Map and compass/GPS. While GPS units are very useful, always carry a map and compass as a backup.
3. Extra water. Without enough water, your body's muscles and organs simply cannot perform as well. Consuming too little water

will make you susceptible to hypothermia and altitude sickness.

4. Extra food. Any number of things could keep you out longer than expected: getting lost, enjoying time by a stream, or difficult terrain. Extra food will help keep up energy and morale.

5. Rain gear and extra clothing. Dressing in layers allows you to adjust to changing weather and activity levels. Two rules: avoid cotton and always carry a hat.

6. Safety items: fire, light, and a whistle. The warmth of a fire and a hot drink can help prevent hypothermia. Fires are also a great way to signal for help if you get lost. If lost, you'll also want the whistle as it is more effective than using your voice to call for help (use 3 short bursts). And just in case you're out later than planned, a flashlight/headlamp is a must-have item to see your map and where you're walking.

7. First aid kit. Prepackaged first aid kits for hikers are available at any outfitter. Double

your effectiveness with knowledge: take a first aid class with the American Red Cross or a Wilderness First Aid class.

8. Knife or multi-purpose tool. These enable you to cut strips of cloth into bandages, remove splinters, fix broken eyeglasses, and perform a whole host of repairs on malfunctioning gear.

9. Sun screen and sun glasses. Especially above tree line when there is a skin-scorching combination of sun and snow, you'll need sunglasses to prevent snow blindness and sunscreen to prevent sunburn.

10. Daypack/backpack. You'll want something you can carry comfortably and has the features designed to keep you hiking smartly.

Extras for overnight hikes. If you are planning an overnight trip, consider having the following equipment: Backpack with good support, Tent, Sleeping bag and pad, Stove and fuel, Extra food and safe storage container, Equipment repair kit.

HIKE SMART - PREP AND PLAN

Hiking is a great way to enjoy the outdoors while getting some fresh air and exercise. Take some time to think about your hike before you go. Many people are just taking a 'short hike' and think it is silly to tell someone where they are going. With hiking, common sense and preparation are essential to have an enjoyable, trouble-free hike.

If you're a beginner, start with short, easy trails and work up to your goal. When in a group, let the slowest hiker set the pace. While it may take a bit longer to reach your ultimate destination, staying together helps reduce the chance of someone getting lost and if someone gets injured you are there to help. Know Your Capabilities –

People who don't turn back when common sense, or others with common sense, tells them they can't make it up and back safely are foolhardy and sometimes dangerous to themselves and others.

Take breaks often. Know your limits and pay attention to how you are feeling when on the trail. A good rule of thumb is that if you can talk while you are walking, you are traveling at the perfect speed. This also allows you to be careful and watch where you are walking, especially on slippery areas or near cliffs. Stick to dry paths and solid rock areas with good footing.

Spray for mosquitoes and check for ticks. Repellents, netting, long pants, and sleeved clothing are the best ways to protect



yourself from insect bites. Wear bug spray repellent to ward off mosquitoes and ticks. Check your clothing and your body for ticks during and after your hike so you don't bring home unwanted guests!

The American Hiking Society has great information for all levels of hikers.

Please visit americanhiking.org for more tips.



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Have a question? Email us at: Cpen_safety_help@usmc.mil

Commanding General's Safety Hotline: 760.763.7233