



Summer Safety --

Hiking and Camping Safety

Many families will head to our national parks and forests this summer to enjoy the great outdoors. But if you're not prepared to rough it in the woods, hiking or camping can be a rough experience. The best way to help guarantee a good time for all is to plan ahead carefully and follow commonsense safety precautions.

Hiking and camping provide exercise and interest for people of any age. Just getting out and walking around is a wonderful way to see nature. Since unexpected things happen, however, the best way to help guarantee a good time for all is to plan ahead carefully and follow commonsense safety precautions.

- If you have any medical conditions, discuss your plans with your health care provider and get approval before departing.
- Review the equipment, supplies and skills that you'll need. Consider what emergencies could arise and how you would deal with those situations. What if you got lost, or were unexpectedly confronted by an animal? What if someone became ill or injured? What kind of weather might you encounter? Add to your hiking checklist the supplies you would need to deal with these situations.
- Make sure you have the skills you need for your camping or hiking adventure. You may need to know how to read a compass, erect a temporary shelter or give first aid. Practice your skills in advance.
- If your trip will be strenuous, get into good physical condition before setting out. If you plan to climb or travel to high altitudes, make plans for proper acclimatization to the altitude.
- It's safest to hike or camp with at least one companion. If you'll be entering a remote area, your group should have a minimum of four people; this way, if one is hurt, another can stay with the victim while two go for help. If you'll be going into an area that is unfamiliar to you, take along someone who knows the area or at least speak with those who do before you set out.
- Some areas require you to have reservations or certain permits. If an area is closed, do not go there. Find out in advance about any regulations--there may be rules about campfires or guidelines about wildlife.
- Pack emergency signaling devices, and know ahead of time the location of the nearest telephone or ranger station in case an emergency does occur on your trip.
- Leave a copy of your itinerary with a responsible person. Include such details as the make, year, and license plate of your car, the equipment you're bringing, the weather you've anticipated and when you plan to return.

What to Bring: A Hiking Checklist

What you take will depend on where you are going and how long you plan to be away, but any backpack should include the following:

- Candle and matches
- Cell phone
- Clothing (always bring something warm, extra socks and rain gear)
- Compass
- First aid kit
- Food (bring extra)
- Flashlight
- Foil (to use as a cup or signaling device)
- Hat
- Insect repellent
- Map
- Nylon filament
- Pocket knife
- Pocket mirror (to use as a signaling device)
- Prescription glasses (an extra pair)
- Prescription medications for ongoing medical conditions
- Radio with batteries
- Space blanket or a piece of plastic (to use for warmth or shelter)
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Trash bag (makes an adequate poncho)
- Water
- Waterproof matches or matches in a waterproof tin
- Water purification tablets
- Whistle (to scare off animals or to use as a signaling device)

Always allow for bad weather and for the possibility that you may be forced to spend a night outdoors unexpectedly.

It's a good idea to assemble a separate "survival pack" for each hiker to have at all times. In a small waterproof container, place a pocket knife, compass, whistle, space blanket, nylon filament, water purification tablets, matches and candle. With these items, the chances of being able to survive in the wild are greatly improved.