

## Take A Hike!

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We all know that consuming fruits and vegetables is good for us. In the same way, we understand that physical activity is important, even if we are not very active! Sometimes we shun walking, running, and other sorts of exercise like the lima beans you gave to dog when you were a child. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adults should achieve at least 150 minutes of

moderate-intensity aerobic activity every week (around 30 minutes a day for 5 days). In addition, the CDC also recommends that your aerobic activity (like brisk walking or jogging) should be combined with at least 2 days per week of muscle strengthening activities (like weightlifting, resistance training, or body weight exercises). Some of this aerobic activity can be done indoors on a treadmill, walking around the block, or even going to a gym. Those activities work well, however, if you are like me, sometimes it's good to change things up a bit. That's when I go take a hike!

Outdoor activities provide several benefits that improve both physical and mental health. You can achieve both moderate and vigorous activity levels while enjoying the fresh air and nature at the same time! An added benefit is that there are usually numerous places to hike that are not too far from where you live. However, if you choose to make hiking a regular activity, there are some things that you should remember that will keep you safe, healthy, and make the recreation more enjoyable. Below are some tips to keep in mind as you prepare for your hike. Please keep in mind that these tips refer to hiking for between 30 minutes and 3 hours. For day hikes or multi-day backpacking, you will need some additional resources (but that will be discussed in a different fact sheet).

1. **Know your weather:** There's nothing worse than going out for a leisure hike only to get caught a mile from your car in a thunderstorm. Poor weather can make a hike miserable and even dangerous, so make sure you check the weather before you go.

2. **Tell a friend:** Before you head out, especially if you are hiking alone, make sure to tell a friend or family member where you are going, when you are leaving, and around the time you plan on returning. Indiana Jones would have gotten into far less trouble if he had simply told a friend of his plans!
3. **Check out a map:** Maps, hard copies or digital, are important especially if you have never hiked a particular area before. Maps will not only tell you direction, but can also inform you of elevation changes and topography which allows you to know if a particular trail is too difficult or not.
4. **Use a compass or GPS:** A GPS or compass can be helpful too. If you are simply going on a short hike where there are lots of foot traffic and signs, it might not be as necessary. But if you are hiking through a remote area, these tools can help you stay on the right path.
5. **Eat before you go:** Many of us are trying to lose weight, which means cutting calories. However, hiking often causes us to exert more energy than we realize. If you fail to eat, or eat enough before you go out for your hike, you may lack the energy to have an enjoyable time, or you could get sick along the way. Choose a healthy, but high energy, food that will help sustain you along the way.
6. **Keep healthy snacks:** Make sure to bring a snack with you as you are hiking, especially if you are going to be gone for a few hours. Nuts, low-sugar granola bars, and dried fruit can provide a great healthy boost when you are in the middle of your journey.
7. **Drink water:** Staying hydrated is crucial no matter what activity you are doing, but with hiking it's especially important. Overexertion, the heat, and other factors increase your need for water. Make sure to bring a reusable water bottle or fit your backpack with a hydration bladder that you can access throughout your hike. It should also be mentioned that rivers, streams, ponds, and lakes are not good sources of drinking water unless you have an



appropriate filtration device. So, make sure to bring enough H<sub>2</sub>O!

8. **Avoid eating the berries:** Sometimes we are tempted to pretend that we are western settlers that are going to live off the land while on a 45-minute hike outside of the city! The problem is that some of those colorful berries, mushrooms, and other blooms can make you sick. So, unless you know what you are doing, stick with the snacks that you bring with you. At the same time, avoid harmful plants like poison ivy which can lead to serious problems.
9. **Apply sunscreen:** Especially if you are hiking in the summer months, the sun can bring more than heat. Make sure to protect your skin from harmful UV radiation by wearing enough sunscreen on your arms, neck, ears, and other exposed areas. Likewise, wearing a



wide-brimmed hat and long sleeves can help prevent sun burn. In addition, having a first-aid kit with you can help you treat minor cuts and bruises along the way.

10. **Store extra clothes:** If you are hiking a significant distance from your home or hotel, make sure to stash some extra clothes in your car or backpack. There's nothing more miserable than having to drive a long distance in smelly wet clothes. Also, extra socks will keep your feet fresh and healthy.



11. **Wear layers of clothes:** If you are attempting to hike for a significant distance, you may start out early in the morning or possibly your hike could extend into the evening. Make sure to wear, or bring, different layers of clothes as the temperature changes throughout the day.
12. **Travel in appropriate footwear:** Boots or hiking shoes can either make or break your hike. Make sure to choose footwear that is comfortable and stable. If you are going to be hiking near water, your boots should be water resistant or waterproof. If you are hiking in winter where snow is possible, make sure that your boots are insulated.

13. **Stay on the trail:** Again, we're not trying to discover the west! If you are hiking at a state or national park, likely there are trails that provide you direction. Make sure to stay on those trails unless otherwise noted. Straying from marked trails can damage plants and the environment that parks are trying to preserve. In addition, leaving the trail can be dangerous, especially in thick wooded areas or near cliffs.

14. **Leave no waste:** Since we are talking about protecting the environment, we should also mention that littering is always a no-no, especially on a hike. Make sure to keep a small trash bag or pocket for snack trash and such.

15. **Know your limits:** Especially if this is your first time on a hike, the excitement can cause us to overestimate our abilities. Start slow and work your way up to longer or more strenuous hikes. Difficult trails, too heavy packs, inadequate snacks or water, and getting lost can make for an unpleasant, or dangerous experience. If possible, include a friend on the adventure! It will make the hike safer and more fun as you share the experience.

## References

Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, May 14). *How much physical activity do adults need?* <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/adults/index.htm>

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