

HIT THE TRAIL

Hiking lets you spend time in nature and benefits body, mind, and spirit—plus, it's as easy or as hard as you want to make it. Lace up and get out there.

BY ASHLEY MATEO



HIKING ETIQUETTE

Make yourself known to other people on the trail (say hi!).

Do not disturb the wildlife.

Train/Dymose/Getty Stock

While we've all had very different experiences over the past year, there was one that was universal: The outdoors was a safe haven. Dining, socializing, and celebrating all moved into the open air, and exercising did, too. Some people started running or biking; others picked up a jump rope or tennis racket. And a whole bunch of us headed for hiking trails. In 2020, the number of hikes logged on AllTrails—the largest hiking and trail-specific navigation app—jumped 171 percent compared with 2019.

Part of the appeal may be the feel-good effect of being outside. According to a 2018 study in *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, you'll be in a better mood within five minutes of being outdoors.

There are fitness benefits too. Hiking at an average pace of two miles per hour is the workout equivalent of a moderately intense hour of tennis. Hiking four miles uphill at an incline grade of up to 5 percent burns roughly twice the calories per hour as walking those miles; add a backpack, and you'll get physiological benefits on par with jogging.

You'll also be doing your immune system a solid. "Inhaling the phytoncides [organic compounds emitted by plants] while spending time outdoors may promote the production and activity of immunity-promoting natural killer cells," says Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, MD, medical adviser for AllTrails and the Association of Nature & Forest Therapy.

The best part: Hiking isn't only about road-tripping to the big parks and canyons. There are plenty of lesser-traveled trails in most towns and cities. So whether you want to go on an all-day adventure or a two-mile urban hike with your family, the beauty of hiking is you can make whatever you want of it.

SMART SNACKING

Fueling a hike requires strategic snack choices. You should eat every 60 to 90 minutes, says Aaron Owens Mayhew, RDN, founder of Backcountry Foodie.

Opt for a combination of carbohydrates, which provide the body with quick-burning fuel; fats, which are metabolized more slowly to provide longer-lasting energy; and protein, which helps build and repair muscle, she says. Think granola bars or apple slices with peanut butter, cheese and crackers, or trail mix with a little jerky in it.

And don't forget to carry enough water—being even a little dehydrated, will affect your performance. "You'll want to sip something every 10 minutes if you are sweating heavily, and every 20 minutes if you are sweating lightly," says Mayhew.



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If you have to pee, do it 200 feet from any water source, so the urine won't travel through groundwater and contaminate it.

HOW TO PICK A TRAIL

The most popular hiking apps (and there are dozens) allow you to filter based on difficulty, length, elevation gain, and more. "The benefit of these apps is that the people using them leave reviews," says Veronica Dzul-Garcia, a gearhead at Backcountry and hiking expert in Salt Lake City. That gives you more insight into current trail conditions and how tough the terrain might be.

The average walking pace is three miles per hour, but you'll likely be slower on a trail, says Hadhinah Felice, a Cotopaxi ambassador and hiking expert based in Las Vegas. Rocks and mud affect your pace, and for every 1,000 feet of elevation gain, you should add an hour of hiking time.

And to ensure that you'll actually enjoy your hiking experience, be realistic about your fitness level. "If you see that the trail is steep or rocky, that's going to be harder on your body than a flatter trail," says Dzul-Garcia.

WHAT TO PUT IN YOUR PACK

Hiking organizations agree there are 10 essentials that you should always have on you: navigation, sun protection, extra clothes, a headlamp, first aid, a knife, a fire starter, shelter (a waterproof tarp will do the trick), extra food, and extra water. However, if that seems like a lot to pack for just a couple hours' hike, prioritize food and water, then these:

► **A MAP AND COMPASS** Even if you plan on using your phone for navigation, "you might not have service or your battery might die," says Rachel Beltran, a supervisor of REI's local experiences in Atlanta. Print a trail map as a backup, and use the compass to orient your map.

► **EXTRA CLOTHES** Weather can change on a dime in the wilderness. "I pack clothing based on the nighttime temperature, even if I'm not planning to be out after dark—just in case I'm delayed," says Beltran.

► **FIRST-AID BASICS** "Most [hiking] injuries are soft-tissue-related (cuts and blisters), so I pack Band-Aids and antibiotic cream, to help prevent infection," says Beltran.

HOW TO STAY SAFE

The best thing you can do to protect yourself—whether hiking with a group or a partner, or solo—is tell someone where you're going, when you're going, and when you expect to be back, says Dzul-Garcia. "If you don't make it back, someone will know what to tell the authorities," she explains.

To avoid getting stuck in dangerous weather conditions, don't just check the forecast, check the radar, says Beltran. If you get caught in a thunderstorm, avoid open spaces and ridgelines, and head to lower elevation. If you are in a forest, seek refuge among a crop of smaller trees, and if you're in a group, spread out. Avoid all water (lakes, rivers, waterfalls) and anything that can conduct electricity, including trekking poles or a metal-framed backpack (leave them 100 feet away from you).

If you're a seasoned hiker, pass along helpful information to those who are less experienced, encourages Danielle Williams, founder of Melanin Base Camp and Diversify Outdoors. "Write trip reports and offer advice to keep the next hiker safe, whether it's warning about dangerous spring-stream crossings, poorly maintained trails, or where to park in order to avoid being towed."

Solo hikers should stick to trails that get a fair amount of foot traffic throughout the day. That way, if you do need assistance, you know someone will come by within 24 hours, says Beltran. But wherever you are, always be aware of your surroundings. People will sometimes use rocks or branches to block inaccessible trails, says Felice, and those are easy to miss if you're not paying attention. And no matter what Instagram photo opp you spot, don't wander off the trail—it's surprisingly easy to get turned around in a dense forest.

HIKING ETIQUETTE

If a trail is too wet and muddy, turn back; trekking through can damage the trail.



The Right Gear

What you wear depends on your personal preferences, but comfortable boots and a day pack are nonnegotiable.

Boots

Think about what terrain you're going to be hiking on the most, and find a shoe that works for that, says Dzul-Garcia. For slick rock and sandstone, you'll want aggressive traction. If you're hiking on muddy or wet trails, go for a waterproof boot with thick lugs. And opt for a lightweight closed shoe that isn't going to roast your feet in the summer heat, says Beltran.

a gap between the straps and the top of your shoulders, the pack is too long for your torso, says Felice.

4. Deuter AC Lite 24 (\$105; deuter.com) This clean style lets you pack more with less bulk. It features a lid opening for easy access to the main compartment, with plenty of zip pockets and external straps for poles and helmets. It's a lightweight, versatile option for a day or weekend in the mountains.

5. Osprey Tempest 20 (\$130; osprey.com) An advanced back panel keeps the weight off your shoulders and your posture in check. It delivers a lightweight, ventilated, and close-to-body fit for all types of movement. P.S. You'll have this for life under Osprey's All Mighty Guarantee!

6. CamelBak M.U.L.E. Pro 14 (\$150; camelbak.com) One of the brand's most popular hydration packs just got an upgrade: The new design provides extra airflow to your body's hot spots (good-bye, back sweat!). Stay hydrated (it holds 100 ounces) and cool on the trail while protecting your goods in this multipurpose backpack.

Not ready to invest in additional hiking gear yet? Start out by renting instead.

➤ **Arrive Outdoors (arriveoutdoors.com)** This Los Angeles-based company ships day packs, trekking poles (good for balance on steep inclines and descents), apparel, footwear, and more throughout the lower 48 states.

➤ **REI (rei.com/rentals)** Items available vary by location, but this nationwide outdoor retailer rents packs, poles, headlamps, water filters, and more.



CANINE COMPANIONS

Consult your vet and always check trail regulations when it comes to bringing a dog with you on the trail. Many do not allow pets, while others require dogs to be on a short leash (six feet or less) at all times. If they are allowed off leash, keep them within sight and earshot, and pick up after your pet and dispose of the waste at the end of your hike.

INCLUSIVITY EVERYWHERE

Nature is for all of us—or it should be. But the outdoors has an inclusivity problem. Only about one in five park visitors is nonwhite, according to the National Park Service.

Danielle Williams, founder of Melanin Base Camp and Diversify Outdoors, has made it her mission to increase ethnic-minority, disabled-community, and LGBTQ+ participation in the outdoors.

Why is the BIPOC community underrepresented on the hiking trails?

When promotional materials are English-language only, or are filled with smiling photos of mostly white families, it reinforces the perception that national and state parks are for white people only. In the United States, one in four adults lives with some form of disability, but parks don't have the infrastructure to physically accommodate [that]—they lack braille, audio features, guide ropes, or wheelchair-accessible trails. Additionally, outdoor spaces are often unaffordable for working-class Black and Latino families. It's not just the per-vehicle entrance fee; it's the time off work and the vehicle and fuel costs.

It's [also] important to realize that nature is political. Parks over-police their non-white patrons. Hiking trails and climbing routes have racially offensive names. Many parks were founded on Native land with ugly histories of broken treaties, land grabs, ethnic cleansing, and massacres.

What needs to be done on a management level to make these places more inclusive?

Parks can start with infrastructure to attract new users or families of color. New users generally benefit from diverse staff; easy-to-moderate hikes; Spanish-language material; outdoor-seating areas; well-maintained and well-marked trails with stroller and wheelchair-accessible grades; and public-education campaigns around safety, permits, "leave no trace," and threatened and endangered species.

What can hikers everywhere do right now to help make the outdoors more inclusive?

Stop automatically questioning the competence and credentials of people in the community who don't look like you. I've dealt with that over the past 10-plus years, and it creates a sense of unbelonging. Instead, try asking what types of outdoor activities people enjoyed when they were younger. Encourage inexperienced hikers by geotagging [ID'ing the location of photos you post on social media] and offering Native land acknowledgments. And hold your elected officials accountable for defunding parks—call or email your congressional representatives.

SOME PRINCIPLES OF "LEAVE NO TRACE"

- Rocks, vegetation, and artifacts should stay where you find them.
- Carry out your trash.
- Hike and camp on maintained trails and designated campsites to avoid damaging surrounding ecosystems.

HIKING ETIQUETTE

When approaching another hiker from behind, announce yourself and let them know you want to pass ("On your left!").

Hikers coming uphill have the right of way.



(Previous spread) Christopher Simpson/Getty Stock; product images courtesy of manufacturers (this spread) Jessica Sample/Getty Stock

Apps & Resources

Stay safe and informed with these apps and websites.



AllTrails

The pro version's Lifeline feature allows five safety contacts to track your real-time location against your planned route. If you're overdue for your scheduled finish time, it automatically sends them an alert with your last known coordinates.



Seek by iNaturalist

Identify plants and animals with this kid-friendly app using image-recognition technology, and read up on commonly recorded flora and fauna near you, based on millions of observations on iNaturalist, an initiative of the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society.



Cairn

Crowdsourced data on the app's maps (which you can download and use offline) show you where people who've hiked before you have found cell coverage on a trail, just in case you need to make an emergency call or need to check in.



PeakFinder

Use your phone's camera to identify more than 800,000 peaks so you can figure out what exactly you're looking at when you're hiking (it works entirely offline).



NEW TERRAIN
Hover your phone's camera over the smart code for a list of easy-to-moderate hikes curated by AllTrails and Health.