

# A Quick Day Hiker's Primer

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## Intro – Value of time exploring trails

There are as many reasons to take a hike as there are rewards to be received from doing so. If you're looking to improve your health, reduce the stress in your life, or simply clear your mind and enjoy the natural environment; hiking delivers almost immediate payback. Consider these reasons to start hiking:

### It's Healthy

It's nearly impossible to argue with the healthy upside of getting out and going for a walk in the woods. A recent Mayo Clinic report states:

*"Hiking, like other exercise, can help you achieve a number of important health benefits. It can help you:*

- Lower low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol (the "bad" cholesterol)
- Raise high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol (the "good" cholesterol)
- Lower your blood pressure
- Reduce your risk of or manage type 2 diabetes
- Manage your weight
- Improve your mood
- Stay strong and fit

*All it takes to reap these benefits is a routine of regular hiking. It doesn't get much simpler than that. And you can forget the "no pain, no gain" talk. Research shows that regular, brisk walking/hiking can reduce the risk of heart attack by the same amount as more vigorous exercise, such as jogging."*

### It's Simple

Hiking is really just walking in a natural setting. One foot in front of the other is something we are all familiar with.

### It's Cheap

Compared to just about any other sport, your upfront spending for gear is minimal. Good shoes, a few pieces of the proper clothing, a comfortable pack, and you're pretty much ready to go.

### It's Real

We all spend too much time inside, facing a screen of some sort, distracted by careers and "entertainment". Hiking encourages you to step away from this indoor life and step back out into nature. It's a chance to experience the world directly, without a filter, and to rediscover the rhythms of the day, the weather, and the seasons. Hiking is an unscripted experience where spontaneity is the rule. Even a trail hiked many times before will deliver daily surprises that keep you engaged and interested.

### It's Fun

The satisfaction of spending time on trails is both an immediate and an acquired pleasure. It is always the adventure that keeps us coming back for more. Many find reward in the simple knowledge that these great places can only be seen by foot, and the challenge of getting to a certain place by our own means. It is worth every step, every ouch, bug bite, and any other discomfort along the way just to know that they will soon be forgotten, while we do remember the breathtaking views, the pleasant smells, and the exhilaration of the experience. Additionally, Hike is an activity that can be experienced

solo, but it can also be extremely reward to share the experience with ours. Hiking is generally done at a “conversational pace”, and as such is an excellent way to share and interact with friends and family.

## Setting goals and expectations – Educate yourself and be prepared

As with anything, it is important to know just what you are getting into when you plan a hike. If you are new to the activity do some simple reading and research to understand what you should expect from yourself and the local environment. Talk to others, or better yet tag along with experienced hikers until you get a feel for what kind of hiking is best for you. There are challenges and pitfalls that are much different than say, working out at the gym. The unexpected is often commonplace, and knowledgeable spontaneity is typically the best plan of action. Once we step off the concrete and on to the trail we are in a different world with different rules. A healthy respect for one’s surroundings in the great outdoors may be the best thing we can bring on a hike. Many outings involve encounters with wildlife. Sometimes it may be a butterfly or quick glimpse of a special bird. In other wilder situations, one may come face to face with creatures that can be potentially dangerous. In every case, knowledge of the natural world is your best resource.

A wealth of information is available online, check out [www.gorp.com/hiking-guide/hiking-and-backpacking-advice-guide-sp.html](http://www.gorp.com/hiking-guide/hiking-and-backpacking-advice-guide-sp.html) to start. Excellent information on wild encounters can be found here: [www.wildawareutah.org/utah-wildlife-information/](http://www.wildawareutah.org/utah-wildlife-information/)

## Trail etiquette - Travel responsibly

Many hiking areas are on sensitive ground, and it is essential that our passage be marked by only minimal impact (leave only footprints, take only photos) In areas that are heavily used this is especially important. Stay on the trail even if it is rough or muddy. Venturing off-trail can lead to un-needed damage and erosion.

Other trail users and property owners deserve our respect as well. Horseback riders and cyclists will usually yield to those on foot, but in some situations it may be easier to just step off the trail and let them pass. The goal is to have smooth, pleasant interaction between all trail users. If you bring your pets along be sure that they are under your control at all times, and that you clean up after them as needed.

## What to bring

What you need to carry with you on a hike will depend on the duration of the trip and the remoteness of the location, but will always include the “basic three” – food, water, and “shell-ter”. (On a day hike this means suitable clothing.) It is especially important to stay hydrated in the backcountry. Drink often and before you become thirsty. Make sure you bring enough calories along so that you don’t run out of energy along the way. Lastly, be prepared for any weather condition that you are may encounter.

Other key items to consider:

- Appropriate footwear – comfortable and sturdy enough for the trail conditions you've chosen
- Map and the knowledge to read it correctly
- First Aid/sunscreen/bug protection, as needed
- Some way to carry your additional gear – day pack/fannypack

## Commonsense

Almost all injuries and fatalities are preventable. They can be prevented by taking the advice of experts and staying within your capabilities. Climbing on steep or rocky areas is not for amateurs and carries considerable risk. Bear in mind that climbing up is far easier than downclimbing.

## **What to avoid – Be aware**

When venturing into the natural landscape it is particularly important to be aware of your surroundings. Keep an eye on the sky. Weather can, and often does, change quickly. Knowing when to turn back can mean the difference between a casual outing and a life-threatening ordeal if you find yourself unprepared for the conditions at hand. Watch the sky for signs of thunderstorms. The wise climber leaves the mountain before the danger exists. We know that most of these storms occur in the mid to late afternoon.

Most wild animals try to avoid human contact. We can avoid them by keeping our eyes and ears open. This means NO HEADPHONES while hiking. As rattlesnakes are common in our area, be aware of where you are placing your hands and feet.

Learn to recognize and avoid poison ivy. If you suspect exposure, the rash can be prevented by washing exposed area with soap and water. You have 2-3 hours to wash off the plant oil (the oil makes the leaves shiny). Remember, "Leaves of three, let it be".

## **Do your part**

Model appropriate behavior, leave the area better than you found it, and treat everyone and everything with respect. Be nice, say hi and support your local trail organization!

Submitted by Weber Pathways, for more trails and hiking information check our website:

[www.weberpathways.org](http://www.weberpathways.org)