

Ten Essentials for a Safe and Pleasant Hike

By Rob Burbank, Public Affairs Director for the AMC

I still haven't learned to pack light.

I'm always trying to whittle down my equipment list and only bring what's absolutely necessary, but I just can't resist the urge to toss a few extra things into my pack — a water filter, say, or a couple of extra sweaters in case it gets really cold. Inevitably, I lug more stuff than I need, but at least I'm prepared for just about anything.



If your goal is to be safe and comfortable in the outdoors, it can be tough to come up with a short list of essentials. What follows is not a comprehensive [hikers' checklist](#), but if you want to pack light, pack smart, and be prepared, here are 10 things you can bring, or things you can do, to help ensure a safe and pleasant day hike.

- **Eat a good breakfast.** It's true: Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. A morning meal that includes hot cereal, like oatmeal or Cream of Wheat, will provide carbohydrates for energy on the trail. Keep your energy level up throughout the day by sipping water and nibbling on fruits and nuts.
- **Tell someone where you're going** and when you expect to return. Let family or friends know your hiking plans. If you're overdue, rescuers will know where to look for you. Posting your itinerary on your car in the trailhead parking lot can be an invitation to thieves, and isn't advised. (Learn what information should be in the [complete itinerary](#) you leave with family or friends.)
- **Get a weather report.** Weather is always the wild card in the mountains. When you hit the trail, wear or bring [clothing that will keep you warm and dry](#), even if the skies are clear. Be willing to turn back if the weather becomes threatening. Stay inside and take up knitting if the weather is dangerous. The mountains will still be there tomorrow.
- **Bring a compass, a map, and a guidebook.** I've said it before: A compass is an invaluable navigational tool, but a lousy talisman. It brings you no

Resource: <http://www.outdoors.org/recreation/hiking/hiking-essentials.cfm?RenderForPrint=1>

luck if it sits in your pocket (which is where it's likely to stay if you don't know how to use it). Consider taking a map-and-compass course (walk-on skill workshops are available as part of our [Outdoor Explorations](#) program.)

- **Bring a light source.** Flashlights or headlamps are essential gear, even if you don't plan on being out after dark. Pop an ankle or wander off trail and, suddenly, your quick hike can take a lot more time. Toss in a back-up flashlight and an extra set of fresh batteries to be truly prepared.
- **Bring a first aid kit.** Simple stuff does the trick. Adhesive bandages, adhesive tape, gauze, a small squeeze bottle to irrigate wounds, antibiotic ointment, and pain relievers are the basics. Also, a bandanna works as a cravat bandage or a sling.
- **Bring plenty of water.** Nobody drinks enough water. And, you need lots when you're exercising. Two quarts per person per day is recommended. Your body functions better when you're well-hydrated, and you feel better, too. Two quarts a day keeps dehydration away.
- **Carry out what you carry in.** It's hard to believe this was a new concept as recently as 1970. Luckily, it's here to stay. There's no trash pick-up in the backcountry, so footprints are all you should leave behind (AMC is a [Leave No Trace Master Educator](#)).
- **Don't forget the duct tape.** Public TV's Red Green calls it the handyman's secret weapon. In the backcountry, duct tape is a repair kit on a roll. Wind a few feet around your water bottle and it'll always be close at hand. A hole in your canoe or a tear in your tent are no fun, but a bit of duct tape can save the day. If you can't fix it with duct tape, it probably wasn't broken to begin with.
- **Stop and smell the flowers.** The summit view you're aiming for is just one part of the hike. The journey to get there holds just as many rewards if we slow down and enjoy them. And, if you have room in your pack, don't forget your camera.