

TIPS FOR SUCESSFUL HIKING

If you can walk, you can hike. And, hiking can offer some additional benefits to supplement your walking routine. Here are just a few of the great things about hiking:

- It can be different each time depending on the trail, landscape and season, so it helps relieve the monotony of other types of exercise;
- Being outside is great for your mental health and connects you more directly with nature;
- You can adjust it to any level of fitness by selecting the appropriate length and difficulty of the trail;

Here are some basic ways to make your hike safer and more enjoyable.

Maintain Your Pace

Just as a long-distance runner doesn't sprint until he's tired and then plod along, you need to pace yourself for the long day ahead. Aim to finish the day walking the same speed at which you started, maintaining a steady pace. By keeping your heartbeat relatively constant rather than subjecting it to dramatic fluctuations, you will expend less energy and cover more distance. Think tortoise rather than hare.

The best way to stay on pace is to develop a hiking rhythm. This is a cadence that you can maintain for a long time without requiring a break. Hiking to a rhythm has benefits:

- More enjoyable hikes because you are less likely to force yourself to stressful exertion.
- Consistent demand on muscles, rather than fluctuating strain when you change your hiking gears. Your body should be less tired on comparable hikes.
- Less chance of injury. Hiking faster increases the risk of stepping wrong and getting hurt. A slower pace with fewer rests is better than faster pace with more required rest stops.
- More even heat generation means you won't need to remove layers while hiking and then add them when stopping to rest. Getting chilled on a hike is a bad thing to have happen all around. Do everything you can to maintain an even body temperature.

Developing your own rhythm may take some time and will fluctuate with the environment and your skill level. Your rhythm is a comfortable pace that you can maintain and is fairly consistent.

To find a comfortable pace:

- Start out at a pace that seems fairly easy.
- Walk for 5 minutes at this pace, taking the same length pace and the same speed of step.
- After 5 minutes, stop and check your breathing. If you are breathing normally, then increase your pace a bit and start over. If you are breathing heavily or are sweating, then slow down your pace and start over.
- Repeat this until you settle on a pace that barely raises your breathing but does not make you sweat.

Using this pace, walk for 30 minutes and mark how far you've gone. Multiply that distance by 2 to find your miles per hour pace.

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Going Uphill

Take smaller steps when going uphill. Keep the same rhythm, but cut each stride by one-half to one-third the length of your regular steps. This will decrease the energy it takes to make the ascent. It is also helpful to find a rhythm between your breathing and stride. This is most applicable to long gradual uphill on relatively even terrain, where you don't have to worry too much about foot placement.

Going Downhill

Take longer steps going downhill and maintain your center of gravity over your feet – don't lean forward or backward. Minimize stress on your joints by keeping your downhill leg slightly bent on impact. This will help ensure your muscles take the brunt of the stress. You can also walk in a zig zag pattern if the trail is wide to avoid facing your knees directly down the hill. Pay extra attention to your foot placement as it's easier to slip on downhill sections, especially if your legs are already tired from a long ascent. It's better to be safe than maintain your rhythm going downhill on steeper sections.

Warming Up and Cooling Down

You should warm up your body for a hike just like you would for a walk. Use the fitness walking full body warm-ups to prepare yourself for a hike. After hiking, be sure to stretch. This is especially important if you were hiking on hilly terrain.

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