

# Best foot forward: Getting properly geared up and walking is really pretty simple

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Copley News Service

Hiking is the adventure sport for everyone, because all it requires is putting one foot in front of the other.

Whether walking urban trails through parks or trekking in the backcountry, hiking is an excellent choice for aerobic exercise.

Adding hikes to a fitness routine is a good way to change the scenery. Instead of staring at cable television while working out on a gym treadmill, you can enjoy an outdoor experience.

But before you start down the trail, learn some fundamentals.

### GETTING STARTED

Hiking is a vigorous outdoor sport. Like other sports,

pre-hike conditioning and warm-ups will help you perform better.

Start walking more, even if it is around town or your neighborhood. Wear comfortable shoes when you walk. Stretching exercises before walking and hiking will keep you limber and reduce risk of injury.

If you have any health questions, visit your doctor.

### BEST FOOT FORWARD

Boots are your most important piece of hiking gear, because the comfort of your feet greatly determines how far you travel.

The key word is "fit." Whether you are hiking on a well-groomed trail or venturing cross-country, boots that slip, slide, bind and pinch are blister machines.

Purchase the best boots with-

in your budget after trying on many pairs. Choose a boot that will fit the type of hiking you want to do, whether light hiking or over more rugged terrain. When trying on boots, wear your hiking socks so you will get a true fit.

Remember, if they don't fit comfortably in the store, they will fit miserably on the trail.

It's hard to beat several pairs of SmartWool hiking socks, the Cadillacs of the hiking hosiery line.

### CLOTHES

Keep in mind that your goal outdoors is to remain warm and dry if it is cold and wet, cool if the weather is hot.

When selecting your outdoor clothes, keep in mind the Three W's: wicking, warmth and weather. This is a layering system that maximizes comfort by allowing you to add

or remove clothing as the weather conditions dictate.

A synthetic-fabric CoolMax shirt when it is warm or synthetic-fabric long underwear when it is cool form the first layer. Synthetic fleece is warm even when wet and makes the best second layer. Finally, a weatherproof layer in the form of a parka and rain pants (if needed) are on the outside. Top of the line are products made with Gore-Tex which sheds rain but allows water vapor from the body to pass through the fabric.

Forget about wearing cotton shirts or jeans. When wet with sweat, rain or snow, cotton is like wearing a soggy sponge.

### GEAR UP

The old adage of "light but right" should be the neophyte hiker's mantra.

You won't need much, but

what you need is essential:

■ A day pack to carry your gear, some snacks and your meal and clothing you're not wearing.

■ Binoculars, a nature guide and notebook will help you keep track of wildlife and record your adventure.

On every hike, carry a pocket knife, first-aid kit, extra clothing, rain gear, water bottle or hydration system, headlamp (better than a flashlight because it keeps your hands free), high-energy trail food, waterproof matches and a fire starter, such as military surplus ration heating bars, sun protection (lip balm, sun block and a hat), insect repellent and a map and compass.

■ Learn how to use the map and compass. Yes, GPS is a hightech wonder, but a compass never has dead batteries.

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