

Take a Hike: Health and Recreational Benefits of Hiking

Written for the All Points Bulletin Newsletter Subscription Service

Client: Brazzell Marketing

Summertime is perfect for enjoying the outdoors and getting in touch with nature. One popular outdoor activity that is done all year round is hiking. Hiking is an activity both novices and experts enjoy. Some people hike occasionally, and some people have experience hiking in many situations and environments. A good hiker will plan his or her hiking trip in advance and will be prepared for what is about to be experienced.

Here are some tips on how to be a smart and prepared hiker:

- Research ahead of time the location and trail you plan on hiking. Learn about your trail's difficulty, terrain, and elevation. Novice hikers are best to walk on flat surfaces or hills with low slopes.
- Know the weather forecast for the day you plan on hiking. Please pack appropriate rain gear with you in your daypack. It is recommended to bring a weather radio with you on your hike so you can check the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) station with frequent weather forecasts and updates.
- Pack lightly. Only bring what is necessary with you. Necessary items include, but are not limited to, a water bottle, first aid kit, emergency rain poncho, insect repellent, and extra dry socks.
- Wear appropriate clothing. If the weather is warm, wear light clothing and a hat to protect yourself from the sun. If it is cold, dress in layers to keep you warm. You should hike in closed-toe shoes. Hiking boots or shoes are preferred, but if the surface is flat, tennis shoes should be fine. Switch between new pairs of socks every so often so you can avoid getting blisters.
- Avoid getting lost. The best way to not get lost is to follow the trail and any trail signs. Learn how to orientate a map and compass. If you are unsure about where you are, use familiar landmarks, or use the sun or moon to find your way back to familiarity. As a last resort, stay calm and put. Use signaling methods to let others know you are lost and wanting to be found.

Even though hiking may take some research and planning, the activity has its health and recreational benefits. First, just being in nature, away from complications of everyday life, can relieve stress. The natural environment can enhance a person's sense of sight and smell and walking in an unstable environment improves balance. With the opportunities of exercise and stress relief, hiking is good for a person's health especially when it comes to improving the heart and muscles. Finally, when you hike with a partner or as part of a group, you have the opportunity to take in some social benefits such as solving challenging problems on the trail and strengthening relationships.

Whether you are aware of what you benefit from a hike, the fun of hiking that most people focus on is the adventure of discovering the surprises of nature.