



BSA SAFETY MOMENT

HIKING

SUMMARY

Hiking is a great way to spend your time in the outdoors. It's also a good way to get your heart pumping for some exercise or to test your limits. Some hikes are just a few hundred feet while others are many miles, but all can pose potential hazards if not carefully considered. Take some time to research your destination and its terrain so you can better prepare to have a memorable experience and fun while exploring.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Not all hikes are the same. Some pose rough terrain while others are more scenic and less physically demanding. Hiking may seem like one of the easiest things you can do in Scouting, but regardless, you should always be prepared for the same risks. Here are a few points to consider when prepping for your hike:

- **Tools**—A clean, sharp, and discreet tool can come in handy, so consider carrying a pocketknife. LED flashlights and fire starters (strike-anywhere matches) are also very useful and should be kept dry.
- **Clothing**—Ponchos or parkas can protect you from rain showers, whether expected or unexpected, as well as block the wind to keep you warm. Comfortable and appropriate footwear will prevent any slips or falls while changing terrain or elevation. Wear clothing appropriate for the weather expected during your hike. Weather can change quickly, however, so be prepared for adverse conditions.
- **Trail food**—Snacks like granola, dried fruits, and trail bars can give you the energy you need to complete your hike.
- **First-aid kit**—While a youth or adult leader will bring a group first-aid kit along, keeping your personal supplies with you is a good idea. Also, if your hike is going to take you above 6,000 feet in elevation, someone in the group should be trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of high-altitude illnesses.
- **Sun protection**—Use a sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher. Broad-brimmed hats, synthetic fabrics, long-sleeved shirts, sunglasses, and lip balm with SPF are also effective in protecting you from the sun's UV rays.
- **Map and compass**—In unfamiliar areas, a map and a compass can help you. Learning how to use them through practice will ensure a safe hike as well as a safe hike home.
- **Water bottle**—Drinking plenty of water while hiking can help to prevent dehydration.
- **Supplies**—Consider writing down the supplies you need and what supplies you think you need. Staying organized with a checklist will provide a safeguard when Scouting and help you to become aware of risks you may not have thought about.
- **Buddy system**—Buddy checks help to remind participants of their obligation to monitor their buddies so no one is left behind or is traveling too far ahead.

RESOURCES

- *Boy Scout Handbook*—Chapter 8, “Hiking”; “The Buddy System” (see Chapter 13)
- *Guide to Safe Scouting*—Trek Safely
- American Hiking Society, “Tips for Your Next Hike”—<https://americanhiking.org/gear-resources/tips-for-your-next-hike/>
- Campout Safety Checklist—www.scouting.org/filestore/HealthSafety/pdf/campout_checklist.pdf