6 Life-Saving Safety Tips for Hiking by Barry Rodgers

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There is nothing healthier for body and mind than taking to the trail and hiking in the great outdoors. Physicians agree that the combination of aerobic exercise from walking along, climbing and descending paths, coupled with fresh air is both invigorating and beneficial for the body.

Apart from these obvious benefits, however, hiking and camping can also be dangerous. There are many hiking-related injuries and even deaths every year. In many cases these incidents could have easily been prevented by hikers taking some basic, commonsense precautions and bringing the right hiking and camping gear.

In this article I will briefly run through some fundamental hiking safety tips which may just prevent you from becoming a campsite casualty.

1. Know your limitations. If you suffer from a medical condition such as a heart problem or any condition which could prevent you from walking distances, you should carefully think about the length of a hike and the severity of the terrain. It is a good idea to have a doctor check you over and give you advice on the level of physical exercise appropriate for your condition, especially if you are over 50 years old and if you are overweight.

2. Wear the right footwear. This would seem to be a fairly basic tip but many casualties occur from people ignoring this simple thing. For hiking, the most important item of clothing to get right is footwear. Make sure you are wearing comfortable socks and proper hiking shoes or boots. They should not be straight out of the box as brand new footwear can cause blisters. Wear your hiking boots in for a while before setting out on a major hike.

3. Wear clothing to suit the climate. If you are on a winter hike, then layers of warm clothing is advisable. You can shed layers if you get warm. A good, breathable waterproof jacket is a must. In summer months make sure that your shoulders and arms are covered by a lightweight shirt, always wear a hat, good quality sunglasses and a high factor sun screen.

4. Take plenty of water and enough food. Unless you know that there are places to buy food along your route, you should take enough for the entire hike. Lightweight, energy-rich foods are the best as they take up little space in your pack and will give you the immediate energy boost you need. In hot conditions, it is a good idea to dissolve some rehydration salts into your water before setting off. You should also take some water purification tablets in case you run out of water and have straight from a stream or lake.

5. Take a small hiking safety pack. This could consist of a whistle, a small flashlight or battery powered camp lantern, a penknife, a compass, a fully charged cell phone, some bandaids/bandages and a small tube of antiseptic cream suitable for insect bites, stings, and small scrapes. Store the local police station number in your phone before setting out and tell local people where you are heading and what time you will expect to be back.

6. Finally, take with you some local knowledge. Buy a map showing your proposed route (the larger the scale, the better) and ask locals about the trail. Ask for any tips and advice they can give you. Find out if there are any local guide books detailing trails in the area. In short, follow the Boy Scout motto; â€œBe Prepared!â€•

Hiking is arguably the best way to fully appreciate the American countryside. You will see, hear and

discover far more about the country than car travellers ever will. Taking these few commonsense precautions will help you do it safely.

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Barry Rodgers is an outdoors enthusiast. He has a love of the outdoors lifestyle and has hiked in the USA and many European countries. Currently living in Greece, he is often found hiking and camping in the mountains and on the beaches of southern Crete with his camping gear, a a camp lantern, a a tent and good friends.

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