

HIKING SAFETY



View of Pikes Peak from Mt. Esther Trail in Colorado

Hiking is one of the most popular activities in the U.S. With thousands of miles of trails, the U.S. has some of the most beautiful and challenging trails. Hiking can be strenuous and challenging or leisurely, depending on your choice of trails and your physical condition and overall preparedness.

ALWAYS BE PREPARED

- **Plan ahead before you take a hike.** Many visitors want to go hiking but have no idea where trails are located, how difficult the hike may be. Before setting out on your hike, be sure you have good trail maps and/or trail guides. **Pocket Pals** is a great place to find this information.
- **Get a weather report.** No matter what time of year it is or how nice the weather may seem....the weather in the high country can change quickly and dramatically in a matter of minutes. For local weather, check the National Weather Service website at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/>. Always be prepared should the weather change.

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- **Wear proper clothing and footwear.** It is best to bring a variety of clothing for all types of weather. You should dress in layers and remove clothing as your body warms up. Hiking in the morning can be chilly and temperatures will increase during the day. Afternoon thunderstorms are quite common in the mountains and should be expected on most days. Good rain gear is a must. A hat should always be worn to prevent heat loss in the colder months or higher elevations and to protect you from the strong rays of the sun at high altitudes.



- **Boots should be well broken in and waterproofed if possible.** Always carry an extra pair of socks in case your feet get wet. If you prefer to hike in shorts carry a pair of jeans or fleece pants to put on over your shorts if the weather turns rainy and cold. Boots should be well broken in and waterproofed if possible.
- **Know where you are going.** [Pocket Pals](#) has a variety of trail maps and hiking guides.
- **Know your physical limitations.** Many visitors to the mountain areas come from lower elevations and don't always realize the affects that the altitude may have on their physical abilities. Elevations in the high mountains vary from 5,000 feet on the valley floor to over 14,000 feet in the surrounding mountains. Because there is less oxygen in the air, many visitors can have adverse physical reactions including "high altitude sickness". Symptoms of altitude sickness can include nausea, headache, and loss of appetite, insomnia and lethargy. Hiking at high elevations can be difficult if you are not accustomed or acclimated to the altitude. Take you time when hiking, drink plenty of water and pace yourself. Keep an eye on other members if you are hiking in a group. If someone appears to be having difficulty keeping up with the group, decide whether the group should continue. Don't hesitate to turn back if you become overly tired. You can always hike another day. If you are visiting from a lower elevation, it would be best not to hike on your first day visiting the higher altitudes. Give your body and lungs a few days to adjust.

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- **Tell someone where you are going.** If possible, tell someone where you are going to be hiking and when you plan to return. Give them your license plate number, the description of your vehicle and where your car will be parked. Sign the trail register, if provided, when you depart and sign it again when you return. This information may help Search and Rescue personnel in locating you, if you become lost. Take a cell phone with you for emergencies (there may not be coverage on all trails but cell phones are light to carry and may work).
- **Bears on the trail.** Bears are found throughout the U.S. and you might encounter a bear while hiking on a trail. Bear sightings are not generally common on busy hiking trails but hikers have occasionally encountered them along a trail. If you meet a bear.....Stay calm. If the bear hasn't seen you calmly leave the area. When you move away, talk out loud or sing quietly to let the bear hear you. Step off of the trail on the downhill side and slowly move away from the bear. **Don't run!** Running will only startle the bear and make it want to chase you. Speak softly. Yelling will only frighten the bear and the bear will think you are threatening. If you are attacked by a bear....Fight back! See the section entitled "Wildlife Safety".
- **Stay on the trail.** Hikers should stay on all designated trails. Going "off-trail" damages delicate soil and fragile alpine plants. Trails are constructed with safety in mind and going "off-trail" could mean hiking on rough, rocky, uneven surfaces. Ankle sprains, abrasions from falls and even broken bones can be a result of hiking on "off-trail" surfaces.
- **Enjoy your hike or ride.** Slow down and enjoy it. Hiking can be challenging but isn't necessarily a competition. Take time to enjoy the beautiful views, take pictures and stop and smell the fresh mountain air, forests, deserts and oceans.
- **Checklist.**

Pack the "Essentials" and be prepared for minor injuries, sudden weather changes or delays. The following are items you should include in your pack:

- Candle
- Clothing (always bring something warm, extra socks, and rain gear)
- Compass
- First-Aid kit
- Food (bring extra)
- Flashlight
- Foil (to use as a cup or signaling device)
- Hat
- Insect repellent

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Checklist (continued)

- Map
- Nylon filament
- Pocket knife
- Pocket mirror (to use as a signaling device)
- Prescription glasses (an extra pair)
- Prescription medications for ongoing medical conditions
- Radio with batteries
- Space blanket or a piece of plastic (to use for warmth or shelter)
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Trash bag (makes an adequate poncho)
- Water
- Waterproof matches or matches in a waterproof tin
- Water purification tablets
- Whistle (to scare off animals or to use as a signaling device)