

FUELING YOUR ADVENTURE

Nutrition and Food Safety for Day Hikes

Healthy foods that are easy to carry and store are a must-have for day-hiking adventures. When you are on a long day hike, it is important to take your meals and snacks with you. Hydration is also important. You will need to drink fluids, preferably water, to keep your body hydrated and energized. This is especially important when it is hot and your body sweats more. However, drinking fluids is just as important when you are out in cooler weather even if you aren't thirsty. Your body has already become somewhat dehydrated by the time you feel thirsty.

For day hikes, it can be easy to pack some snacks and a couple meals. These balanced, nutritious snacks and meals will give your body the energy, vitamins, and minerals it needs to sustain physical activity over a longer period of time. Without adequate nutrition and hydration, you may not feel your best during the activity and find it difficult to make it as far as you intended on your day hike.

You can keep perishable foods, or foods that spoil quickly, cold for short periods of time using a small



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cooler and frozen gel packs. There are also other food options that don't require colder temperatures. Because you will have to carry your food, it is important to take only what you need. Choose wisely when it comes to the weight of the foods and what you need to prepare them.

Perishable foods

For day hikes, it's possible to keep perishable foods cold. You might choose foods for a typical picnic: sandwiches, cut vegetables, fruits, and hard cheeses. It's easy to keep these perishable choices cold while on the trail. Freeze sandwiches the night before or place them in your backpack with frozen water bottles, juice boxes, or cold packs. Small coolers are also an option that you can pack with cold packs.

If you choose to cook on your day hike and wish to bring items such as raw meat or chicken, follow these rules.

- Research what type of cooking, if any, the trail or park you are hiking allows. A campfire may not be an option in the area you are in. Other options may be allowed, such as camping stoves.
- Keep cold foods cold in lunchboxes or coolers. These foods are meant to be stored at 40 degrees F or cooler.
- Don't leave foods out for more than two hours, no more than one hour if the temperature is 90 degrees F and above.
- Pack the foods safely. Wrap raw meats and poultry well. Package them separately, if possible, and store them under ready-to-eat foods so juices do not drip and ruin these foods.
- Take a meat thermometer. Use the thermometer to ensure you cook the food thoroughly. Cook



- burgers made from ground meats including beef, pork, veal, or lamb to 160 degrees F. Cook all chicken and poultry products to 165 degrees F. Cook whole cuts of pork and fish to 145 degrees F.
- Consider precooking meats or burgers and reheating to 165 degrees F while on the trail.

For most day hikes, people may choose not to carry coolers to reduce weight and the number of items they carry. Keep this in mind when planning what perishable foods to bring. Luckily, there are many shelf-stable, nutritious options you can pack and not need to keep cold.

Shelf-stable foods

Shelf-stable foods are ideal options for day hiking. Some of these foods might be heavy to carry in your pack, so remember to bring only what you need or buy smaller quantities or individual portions sizes to reduce weight. Consider packing dried or powdered items and mixes in plastic bags.

Here are a few foods you might choose that are shelf stable.

- Peanut butter
- Juice boxes
- Canned meats
- Dried or freeze-dried foods
- Jerky or dried meats
- Dried fruit
- Nuts and cereals
- Crackers
- Powdered milk or drink mixes
- Energy or protein bars

Pay attention to what you need to prepare dried and powdered mixes. Consider the amount of water you need to bring along and preparations that might be involved. When planning your meals, make healthy options and proper nutrition a priority. If you are going for a short day hike, small snacks might be enough. However, if all your meals for the day are on the trail, you will need to make sure your body is getting the protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, and minerals it needs. Choose a variety of foods from the options listed for nutrient-balanced snacks and meals.

Water

You will need to drink plenty of water to keep your body hydrated during your day hike. Consider whether you need water for any food items you packed for the adventure. For shorter day hikes, bringing bottled water along to drink may be

enough. If you can't carry enough water to drink and cook, you can use water from natural sources such as lakes and streams. However, you must purify it. The best way to purify water is to boil it. If the water is cloudy, first allow it to stand and let the particles settle to the bottom. Dip the clear water that has separated off the top and boil it. Bring the water to a rolling boil. Once it reaches this point, allow it to boil for at least one minute. Once it cools, boiled water might taste different, but it is safe to drink.

You can also purify water using purification tablets and water filters. You can find these products at camping supply stores (e.g., REI). It is important that if you use this method, you use both the tablets and the filters. You need both to kill most bacteria, viruses, and parasites that might be present in the water. For intense day hiking (e.g., major elevation changes, longer than 10 miles), sophisticated filtration systems are available, but are most likely unnecessary for shorter day hikes.

Cleanup and hand-washing

It is important for the environment that you leave nothing behind when you take a hike. This means all trash, as well as leftover food and scraps. Things such as disposable wipes for cleaning and sanitizing are good options that you take with you until you find a trash can. You can also use water sanitizing tablets and biodegradable camping soaps to clean dishes. You can find them at camping supply stores. Use these items away from natural water sources and dump dirty water away from fresh water. If you take a cooler or cooking utensils with you, consider proper cleaning and sanitizing once you get home.

Eating on the trail is no different than eating at home. Washing or sanitizing hands is just as important, if not more. It may be difficult to wash your hands with running water and soap on the trail, so hand sanitizer or hand sanitizing wipes are the easiest to carry along. Just remember to dispose of them properly once you're off the trail.



Fueling adventure with family and friends

Knowing how to pack nutritious foods and keep food safe on a day hike not only keeps you fueled and hydrated, but it also gives you the opportunity to spend time with family and friends of all ages. Getting outside, enjoying nature, and moving your body in enjoyable ways benefits both your physical and mental health. When will you go on your next day hike adventure?

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