

Hiking Safety Resource Guide

Hiking Injury Statistics



There are an estimated **4 deaths per 100,000 hikers** per year. ([Faulhaber et al, 2020](#))



Day hikers account for 42% of national park search and rescue cases, which is four times greater than overnight backpackers. ([National Geographic](#))



71% of all hiking-related deaths are due to a traumatic injury ([National Park Service](#))

Safety Tips

Before the Hike



MAKE A PLAN

- **Plan your route ahead of time.** Be sure to consider things like timing, ability level, experience, weather, and any changes in altitude if you are in a new environment. When figuring out timing, consider both the time needed for the entry AND return hike, as well as the time needed going uphill versus downhill.
 - Check out [Disabled Hikers](#) for more information on [How to Find Accessible Trail Information](#) or view their [Trail Guides](#) (currently only available for Washington, California, and Oregon)
 - Not sure where to begin? Stop by the visitor center or ask a park ranger for guidance and recommendations before setting out on the trail.
- **Share your Trip Plan.** Once you've decided on your plan, be sure to tell someone else who isn't going with you – let them know what time you leave, your destination, the route you plan on taking, and what time you plan to be back. This can be incredibly helpful in the event of an emergency requiring search and rescue efforts.
- **Have a backup plan.** Plan out what you are going to do if the weather changes, a trail becomes unsafe, or what to do if you or your someone you are with becomes lost or injured.
 - Want to learn how to be prepared in the event of an emergency? Check out [Solo Schools](#) or [REI](#) to learn wilderness first aid and other ways to be prepared, especially if you are hiking in the backcountry and remote wilderness.

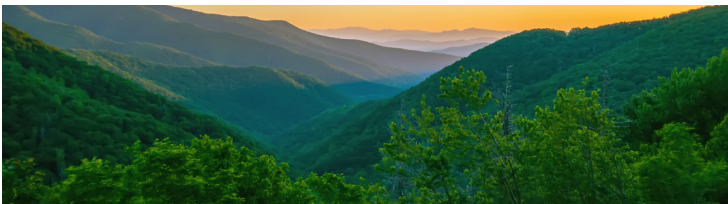
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Safety Tips

Before the Hike (Continued)

PACK SMART

- **Wear sturdy shoes** with ankle support, lightweight and moisture-wicking fabrics, and be sure to **wear layers** as temperatures can change quickly.
- **Pack the 10 Essentials** recommended by the American Hiking Society.
- **Don't rely on your smartphone**, as the battery could die and there may not be cellular coverage and reception. Having a personal locator beacon, or other navigational tools such as a map and compass can be helpful to help you navigate.



CHECK AHEAD

- **Be sure to check the website** of the park or recreational space you are visiting to see if there are any alerts regarding wildfire risk, trail closures, or other important considerations.
- Talk to the rangers or visit the park site's webpage to **find out what inclement weather events are most likely at this time** of year and how to stay safe in them.
 - Hiking in New England? Check out [hikeSafe](#) for more information on seasonal weather considerations in the [White Mountains, NH](#) and [Green Mountains, VT](#).

During the Hike

STAY ON THE TRAIL

- Staying on the trail helps ensure you and your party **stay safe and helps protect wildlife areas and natural resources**.
- There may be unmarked paths that have been created by others, but **try to stay away from these** as it will be easier to get lost.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO TURN BACK

- If you get lost or lose sight of the trail markers, **don't be afraid to turn back**. Only focusing on reaching your destination can take away from your experience and can put you at higher risk of injury if you try to power through and ignore your instincts.

TAKE YOUR TIME

- **Let the slowest hiker set the pace** and stay together if hiking in a group.
- **Take breaks often and check in with yourself** to see if you need to modify your pace or route. Walking at a speed where you can comfortably talk indicates you are walking at a good pace.
- **Watch your step** and be careful where you are walking, especially on slippery areas, loose rocks, or near cliffs.
- **Be careful when hiking near water**, especially fast flowing water such as waterfalls and swift or cold waters. Don't attempt to cross streams when conditions are unsafe such as when it is icy, flooding, moving rapidly, or you're uncertain of the depth.

Visit BWHSteppingStrong.org to watch our Hiking Safety Lunch and Learn and learn more.