

# 101+Hiking tips

I was asked to present a talk titled 101 Plus Hiking Tips and am sharing these tips here. Credit for these should go to many sources as I have followed the advice of many fellow hikers. Special mention should be made, however, of the experienced hikers that have contributed their knowledge to the [BackpackingLight Mailing List](#) and to two books; Ray Jardine's [Beyond Backpacking](#) and [A Hiker's Companion](#) by Cindy Ross & Todd Gladfelter.

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## Packing and Unpacking

1. Putting on your pack: Grab the pack by its haul loop and one shoulder strap, and lift it to one bent knee. Turn your back into the pack while inserting one arm into its shoulder strap. The pack is now hanging from that shoulder. Continue to swing the pack around and insert the the other arm, elbow first, into its shoulder strap.
2. Your waist belt should rest above and on your hip bones.
3. Fitting your pack: don't over tighten shoulder straps. Tighten just enough to keep your pack close to your body and stable.
4. For most packs, place heaviest items close to your back near the middle of the pack. The sleeping bag goes in first, followed by the food bag (perhaps the heaviest item).
5. Have a place for each item and always return the item to that place.
6. If possible, store stove gas and water outside the pack so everything doesn't get wet if the containers leak. Better yet, use a wood stove.
7. Items that you expect will get wet go outside if possible: rain gear, pack cover etc.
8. Often needed items go in a top pocket.
9. Attach a thermometer for a zipper pull.
10. Attach an "office" to a shoulder strap or your waist belt or carry a fanny pack. Items to carry in it may include: camera, compass, whistle, maps, pen and paper.
11. Extend your packs life: after the trip shake it out, clean inside with mild soap and water, dry out of the sun. Store it in a cool, dry place.
12. Dry your sleeping bag flat, not hung.
13. Carry your sleeping bag inside a silnylon stow sack. These are very lightweight and waterproof.
14. Always shake the water off your wet tent or tarp before packing it.
15. Always stuff bags, tents, tarps etc. into their sacks, don't fold them. Folding in the same place repeatedly creates weak spots in the fabric.
16. When stuffing a tent into its stuff sack, the door of the tent should go in last. That way the air that always collects inside will be easier to get rid of as you push it toward the door.
17. Between trips, do not store a sleeping bag in its stuff sack. Buy a large burlap bag for sleeping bag storage.
18. Some people like to keep their backpack packed and ready to go. This is okay for most everything except your sleeping bag. I have a large plastic storage box where I keep everything ready to pack (except the sleeping bag).

19. Home Depot sells mesh bags in 1 gallon and 5 gallon sizes for about \$1.00. They are intended for straining paint but hikers can cut them up and sew them into ditty bags. I made a little one for stakes that weighs just 0.1 oz.
20. Transfer portions of liquids like insect repellents, sun screen, etc. into smaller containers. I like to use small eye drop bottles.
21. To carry tiny amounts of jells or pastes like toothpaste, vasaline, etc. use a large diameter straw. Cut 3/4" off both ends. Jam the center section into the jell or paste until it is within an inch of filling. Close the ends by folding the last 1/2" back on itself, then fold this again lengthwise, and insert into the 3/4" pieces that you previously cut.

## **Clothing**

1. No cotton please, it dries very slowly and holds moisture next to your skin.
2. Go to the bathing suit dept. for hiking shorts. Columbia makes water shorts with a built in liner (no underwear needed), which are very water repellent and dry very quickly.
3. If you have problems with thigh chafing, you may want to choose Lykra shorts which are tight around the thigh thus preventing the problem.
4. In winter, the tried and true layering system applies here. I like a thin smartwool base, a middle insulating layer, and an outer water repellent, breathable shell.
5. Your clothing should always be in a waterproof bag such as a 10 X 21 Silnylon stow sack.
6. Wash your clothing as often as possible, clean clothes feel better and wear better. They are also warmer as the accumulated oils in dirty clothing reduce their loft and conduct heat away from the body.
7. While hiking keep a bandana wrapped around one of your front straps where it is immediately available.
8. Summer Hat: wear a broad rimmed hat with a strap like the Tilly, or Ultimate Hat. Gives us glasses wearers better protection from blowing rain and sun protection all the way around for everyone.
9. For a clothes line twist a double rope before tying between trees. The twists will hold your clothes like clothes pins.
10. Here is a choice for you to make. One argument goes; wear dark clothing because it dries faster, another says wear light clothing because it is less attractive to bugs. For me, the argument for light colors has won this argument. If hiking in tick country, definitely go with light colored clothing because it is easier to spot these critters. Dry it quickly by laying on dark colored rocks in the sun.
11. Be sure to tighten the tiny connecting screws on your glasses before leaving home. You can also apply Loctite Threadlocker to prevent the screws from working loose.
12. See Clothing on the notes page for more specific information about what I take for three season hiking.

## **Staying Warm or Cool**

1. Eat foods with lots of fat content, like a handful of nuts, just before going to bed to keep you warm during the night.
2. Some say put on rain gear in bed if your are really cold. It will act as a vapor barrier. Others argue that it will also keep in moisture and your clothing will chill you in the morning as the moisture evaporates. If you do use a vapor barrier, it should be worn between a base and outer layer..
3. Stop hiking before you are completely exhausted, especially when it is cold and wet.
4. In your sleeping bag, put on a balaclava hat and/or pull the sleeping bag hood up and around your head.

5. You will tend to hunker down into your bag when it is cold. Just don't bury your head in the bag as breathing into the bag will cause it to become wet and lose insulating qualities.
6. If your back is hot and sweaty from your pack, but your front is cold from the wind, wear your jacket in reverse with the back unzipped. Put the jacket on before your pack and the pack will hold it in place.
7. After a day of hiking in cold wet weather, set up camp and change into your dry clothing. Hang the wet clothing up to dry. In the morning put the dry clothing in your pack and change back into yesterday's clothes, even if they are still wet.
8. Rather than take off clothing to keep cool in your sleeping bag, unzip the bag and use it like a quilt. If still warm slide it off part of your body.
9. Air out your sleeping bag daily, especially if on a long hike. Your lunch break is a good time to do this. Drape it over rocks rather than vegetation for best results. Even wrapping it around you as you walk will help if you can't take the time to air it during a break.
10. Carry strike anywhere matches or a metal match, and some tinder, all in a waterproof container, for starting a fire in an emergency. I carry a few feet of jute, that can be cut into smaller lengths, then torn apart, for this purpose.
11. The first week of winter spray your feet three times with an aluminum chlorohydrate antiperspirant. After that, once a week. This will stop 50 to 75 percent of foot wetness which leads to foot coldness.
12. In winter, rub your hands with Hand Sense. This cream was developed by the military to block bad things from penetrating the skin. It will keep your hands dry and consequently warm inside your mittens. Hand Sense: North American Safety Products. 800-589-6536
13. Clothing should be your main protection from the sun. Suntan lotion can interfere with the body's ability to cool itself by blocking perspiration and its subsequent evaporation.
14. In hot weather, walk in the morning and evening and take a long break in the middle of the day. Eat dinner during this break and lunch food in the evening.
15. Soak your head, hat, shirt, or your towel placed under your hat, in lakes and streams to keep cool.
16. In hot weather don't skimp on the salt.
17. Ray Jardine uses an umbrella both for rain and sun. In the desert this is a must.

## Your Campsite

1. A tent for a single person should not weigh more than 3 lbs. Consider also, a tarp or hammock. You will find excellent information on tarp camping in Ray Jardine's book, *Beyond Backpacking*.
2. Setting up in wind: Stake down the side of the tent facing the wind first. The entrance to the tent should face away from the wind.
3. Wind not a problem: Face the front of the tent toward the ENE in summer, E in fall and spring, and ESE in winter (where the sun will rise).
4. Setting up in rain: Get out the fly first. Spread it out on the ground. Set up the tent beneath the fly.
5. Most modern tents don't need a ground cloth. If you use one it should be 2" smaller than your tent all the way around. This will prevent rain from channeling under your tent via overhanging ground cloth. You can also place the ground cloth inside your tent.
6. Make the ground cloth for your tent out of an emergency space blanket. You will have a very light ground cloth and it is available to serve its other purpose. Place it inside your tent.
7. For tarp camping, I have made a Tyvek ground cloth measuring 84" long with varying width's; 32" at the head, 38" at the chest and 24" at the feet. Some hikers add a fold at the bottom to make a pouch for their feet. The pouch protects the bottom of the sleeping bag from splashing raindrops that may enter at the rear of the tarp.

8. Tyvek is that white house wrap you see at construction sites. It is light, waterproof/breathable, and can be sewn. After cutting a new piece, run it through a cycle in the washing machine. It will come out feeling soft and pliable.
9. Try to find a level camping site. If not possible go for a slight incline with your head uphill. Ray Jardine does just the opposite, placing his head downhill so that blood does not collect in the feet and lower legs. Better try each and see which suits you.
10. Lay down on the spot you have selected for your tent. While you are there find roots, rocks, pine cones etc. that need to be moved or adjusted for. Do not remove the soft forest litter.
11. Place your ground cloth in position. Lie down on it and mark where your hips and shoulders contact the cloth. Now get off, lift the cloth and dig small depressions for your hips and shoulders. Fill these in when you depart.
12. Use a sleeping bag liner to keep your bag cleaner longer. Don't like liners, then sleep with your clothing on to keep dirt off your bag.
13. Put clothing in your sleeping bag stow sack and use it for your pillow.
14. Don't forget to fluff up your sleeping bag after laying it in your tent.
15. Don't use a compression stuff sack for your sleeping bag and never sit on the bag while it is in its sack. You don't want it to lose any of its loft.
16. If it is cool outside your glasses will fog up when you leave your tent. To prevent this, lay them on your chest for a few minutes before getting up and out.
17. Cut a small square of Tyvek to use as a mat just outside your tent door and to sit on during rest breaks. In winter replace this with a square of closed cell foam.
18. Fire follows you because it follows the vacuum you create. If you build a short wall of rocks on one side of the fire ring it will go there instead of to you.