



HOW TO GET FIT FOR HIKING



AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

Iconic Multi-Day Hikes

RAW TRAVEL
ICONIC WALKS WORLDWIDE

Certified

Corporation

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TRAIN?

Multi-day hiking requires muscular strength, cardiovascular endurance and balance. Most hiking trails are uneven and have some elevation gain, so you need strength and flexibility in your knees, ankles and feet to avoid injury.

Give yourself at least 8 weeks to prepare, longer if possible. The fitter you are, the better you will be able to cope with the physical demands of multi-day hiking.

Something as small as a blister can be an impediment to your progress and enjoyment on the trail. Other common injuries from lack of preparation include shin splints, tendonitis, joint and muscle pain.

If you're not sore and over-exerting yourself, you can soak in all of nature's beauty each day and feel refreshed, renewed and satisfied at the end.

Being in the best shape possible can also give you an incredible mental boost on challenging days. Good training helps you to be relaxed and enjoy your hike, rather than being overwhelmed and under psychological stress from the effort of hiking.

HOW TO BE WELL PREPARED

- Spend more time outside
- Work on your fitness and stamina
- Test your gear in the worst possible weather
- Get used to the weight of your day pack on your shoulders
- Familiarise yourself with the safety risks involved, eg unpredictable weather, snakes, bushfires, limited access to water



GETTING STARTED

Getting physically prepared for your trip is all part of the experience and one that you'll benefit from long after you're completed your walk. Moderate activities such as walking pose little health risk but before starting any new exercise program we recommend that you see your doctor for a check-up, particularly if you have a medical condition, are aged over 40 years, are overweight or haven't exercised in a long time.

To prepare your body, we recommend you start a training program about 8–12 weeks out. If you do not have a good fitness base, a 12–16 week progressive build-up to pre-trip hiking fitness may be more appropriate.

It's not uncommon for people of good fitness and prior hiking experience to skip these recommended training periods but if you want to enjoy your trip without any aches and pains then training and a gradual build up and conditioning is the way to go! Even for relatively fit people it's a good idea to condition your shoulders for carrying a day pack all day – and your ankles and feet, too. It's better to gradually build up strength and resilience rather than suddenly subject your body to these physical demands!

To build stamina and strength, it's best to divide your training program into different phases. To start, you will need to build a good foundation so that you can safely go a bit harder later on. Our bodies get used to physical activity, so as your fitness levels improve you can increase the intensity and duration of your walking. Once you have reached your peak, reduce your training and rest.

When you are comfortable completing a number of shorter walks each week, test yourself with a 3–5 hour walk over hilly terrain through bushland. You might find it hard to get going at first but after a few weeks you will notice a big improvement, which can be very motivating. When you can comfortably complete a training walk of 6–7 hours, including rest breaks, add in a long-weekend hike where you are walking 15–20km both days.

PACKING A FIRST-AID KIT

For long training walks, we recommend packing a first-aid kit. The extent of what you pack is really a personal choice. Take items that have multiple uses. Improvise if you get injured. Your kit should include: absorbent and non-absorbent dressings, adhesive tape (surgical, stretchy), antiseptic wipes, bandages x two (sprains, snake bite), Band-aids, blister pads, emergency/thermal blanket, gastro-stop/rehydration powders and pain killers.



TRAINING ESSENTIALS

FIND SIMILAR TERRAIN

Train on terrain that is similar to what you will walk on. If your trip is on hilly, rugged trails, train on steep uneven trails. If your hike includes sand dunes, find a beach to train on. Use and wear the clothing and equipment that you will bring on the trail with you.

MIX IT UP

Don't limit your walking to prepared or cleared trails. Practise walking on uneven ground (rocky, muddy, tree roots etc), as well as uphill (ascents) and downhill (descents). There is a significant mental toughness required for long days of trekking, so make sure you include full days (and preferably multi-days) in your training.

HEAD FOR THE HILLS

A great way to build endurance and aerobic capacity is to train on hills. Bursts of intensity (uphill) followed by periods of recovery (flat/downhill sections) will help you to tackle longer, steeper sections with less fatigue.

RAIN, HAIL OR SHINE

Practise training in different weather conditions and at different times of the day. Accept that at some stage during your training you might feel tired, sore or cranky, but it will pass. If you are training during the summer months or during hot weather, heat exhaustion and dehydration is a risk factor. Make sure you wear a broad brimmed hat, long sleeved top, sunglasses, and high-factor sunscreen. Carry sufficient water, drink regularly, and take time to rest in shady areas.

DRINK LITTLE AND OFTEN

If you feel thirsty while out walking your body is already in the early stages of dehydration. Drink little and often. For longer walks, add powdered electrolytes to your water to help replace lost body salts and help aid your recovery. Day packs with built-in water bladders make it easy to stay hydrated and are a good alternative to carrying water bottles. They cut out the need to stop every time you need a drink. Being able to drink smaller amounts of water more frequently also eliminates that feeling you get when you drink too much water all at once.



TEST ALL YOUR EQUIPMENT

During your training walks it's vital that you test all the equipment and clothing that you'll be using on your actual walk, not just your boots, as you may find some things uncomfortable over long distances such as zips or chafing from seams. Get used to carrying your day pack on long walks and try a walking pole. Carry adequate water, nutritious snacks, a basic first aid kit and anything else you might need to keep you comfortable and happy, such as a hat, sunscreen, insect repellent or a jacket.

WARM UP AND COOL DOWN / YOGA

The best way to warm up is to walk slowly. Start off each walk at a leisurely pace to give your muscles time to warm up, and then pick up the speed. Afterwards, gently stretch your leg muscles – particularly your calves and front and back thighs. Stretches should be held for at least 20 seconds. If you feel any pain, ease off the stretch. Don't bounce or jolt, or you could overstretch muscle tissue and cause microscopic tears, which lead to muscle stiffness and tenderness.

STRETCHES / YOGA

A key to multi-day hiking is the ability for your body to recover quickly. Having good flexibility assists hugely in speeding recovery. Find a set of stretching exercises and start to incorporate them into your training regime. You will find that not only do you feel stronger, and recover more quickly, but the habit will extend to maintaining the stretching routine during your walk, which will make all the difference to tiredness and muscle recovery day after day. Stretching after exercise is the best time to stretch, not before.

Yoga stretches are ideal and there are many benefits to committing to a simple yoga practice each day on a hike. Poses can be done before, during and after your walk each day, helping to protect your body. You'll wake up a lot less sore the next day and have a better sleep.

MASSAGE

Self-massage and a foot soak are great ways to loosen tight muscles and get rid of lactic acid after a long training walk. If you search for 'self-massage techniques' you'll find lots of useful instructions, tips and videos online. If hiking soreness is a routine problem, invest in a deep tissue or sports massage. If you don't like the way you feel post-walk, invest time in working out what the cause is and fixing it. Listen to your body and adjust your stretching, technique or equipment.





WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR TRAINING PROGRAM

Start a training program at least 8 weeks from your planned hike. Gradually increase distance and intensity each week.



REGULAR, CONSISTENT HIKING

How much you train will depend on your current fitness and the duration/terrain/difficulty of your hike. Aim to do at least three walks per week. Whenever you head out for a training walk, take a day pack stocked with water, spare clothes and a first-aid kit.



CROSS-TRAINING AND STRETCHING

Include a few cross-training sessions, eg, swimming, gym workout/group fitness class or bike riding. Cross training, along with regular stretching, will reduce your risk of injury and keep the training interesting. It's particularly important for beginners who are just starting to build their strength and endurance.



FULL/MULTI-DAY HIKES

Add full-day and multi-day walks to your training schedule. The more training you do and the better prepared you are, the more you will enjoy your walk.



WEIGHTS

Although walking is mainly a cardiovascular activity, to keep going for long periods requires total body strength, so you should also consider a weights program that will strengthen your leg, neck and shoulder muscles, as well as your core.



GYM PROGRAM

If gyms are your thing, go for it. The step machine is great for preparation. Ask a fitness trainer to design an exercise program for you. This can make a big difference and you can achieve amazing results.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Plan a schedule and stick to it as closely as possible.
- Track your progress, wear a pedometer or keep a journal.
- Involve your family and friends on your longer walks or join a walking club.
- Mix up your training activities so that you don't get injured or bored.
- Include other forms of exercise, such as swimming or cycling.
- Be mindful of what you eat. Experiment with nutrition and hydration.





WARMING UP AND COOLING DOWN

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BASIC STRETCH ROUTINE

Hamstring (back of thigh)

- Cross your right foot over your left.
- Bend forward from your hips and keep your back straight and your hands pointing down towards your toes.
- Lean forward until you feel the stretch down the back of your left leg. Do not bounce.
- Hold for 20 seconds.
- Repeat with the other leg.

Quad (front of thigh)

- Standing on your left leg, hold your right foot in your right hand behind your backside.
- Hold your stomach in and gently push your hips forward until you feel the stretch down your right thigh.
- Hold for 20 seconds.
- Repeat with the other leg.



Calf

- Put your hands on a wall at shoulder height.
- Stand with your right leg forward, foot flat on the floor.
- Extend your left leg straight back, placing your heel flat on the floor. Don't bend your back knee.
- Bend the front knee and lean into the wall until you feel a stretch in the straight leg.
- Hold for 20 seconds.
- Repeat with the other leg.

Hips

- Stand with your feet at shoulder width apart and put your hands on hips.
- Keeping your head still, rotate your hips clockwise 10 times and anti-clockwise 10 times.
- Repeat 3 times.

Standing stretch

- Stand with your feet together.
- Place your hands together and reach as high as you can.
- Hold for 10 seconds, relax.
- Repeat 3 times.

PREVENTING SNAKE BITES

If you are training in the warmer months, you'll likely encounter a snake or two. Snakes like to sun themselves on paths and alongside logs. By walking heavily you can warn concealed snakes of your presence so they are not startled and don't lash out.

Most bites from Australian snakes are 'dry', but you should treat a snake bite seriously as venom may have been injected, which can be fatal.

If you are hiking in Australia, you should familiarise yourself with [👉 snake bite management](#) on the St John Ambulance website and make sure your first-aid kit contains enough useful bandages. This [👉 video](#) demonstrates the pressure immobilisation technique for snakebite.

As most snake bites occur below the knee, we recommend wearing long pants and/or gaiters as protection for lower legs and feet. Gaiters fit on the outside of hiking pants and hiking boots. While they don't offer 100% protection from snake bites, they can help reduce injury.

IF YOU ARE UNLUCKY ENOUGH TO GET BITTEN

- bandage the bite area firmly (without hindering blood circulation)
- don't wash the bite
- splint the bandaged limb (with whatever you can find, eg a stick) so it's immobilised
- stay still so the venom is not pumped around your body
- record the time the bite occurred and when the bandage was applied
- if you have been bitten on the wrist/arm, remove any rings, bracelets and watches
- seek emergency medical assistance

Australia averages only two snakebite deaths a year. Be cautious, be prepared and enjoy your hike!





CHOOSING HIKING BOOTS

There are many good makes of hiking boots. Finding the right make and model comes down to the fit on your foot. For comfort and safety, go for waterproof boots that have a good sole with good grip, provide ankle support and ideally are lightweight. Though sometimes a durable well constructed waterproof boot is often a heavy one.

If you are walking in a desert or hot environment you may choose to trade off some features like waterproof for lighter more breathable boots or ones with a mid-cut ankle rather than a full ankle. This is one area where good advice really pays off and it's worth spending the time to have your feet measured properly. You don't have to have the most expensive boots just the ones that are the best match for your specific foot shape and intended use.

OUR TOP TIPS FOR BUYING BOOTS

- Choose boots that are the right length for your feet.
- Make sure there is enough toe room. There is nothing worse than jamming your toes on the front of a boot when descending downhill.
- Wear the same socks you prefer to wear for hiking.
- Look after your boots – when you get soaked, dry your boots slowly.
- If you have worn the soles down to the point where there is little grip, you either need them re-soling or you need new boots.

BUY THE BEST SOCKS YOU CAN AFFORD

It's the little things that make the biggest difference. Don't match an expensive hiking boot with the cheapest pair of socks. Socks will make a huge difference to your comfort and experience. Trust us on this one; save money on other items instead.

There are many brands and styles available. Merino wool or a mix of Merino and synthetics are the best choice. Wool and synthetics regulate the temperature of your feet and will wick away sweat and moisture, keeping your feet dry and free of blisters. Avoid cotton at all costs as it will stay damp and smell badly! Merino wool smells less than other materials and can be safely used again the next day but make sure you air your feet and wash them at the end of each day.

Choose socks that are a few inches higher than your footwear to avoid the edge of the boot rubbing directly against your skin. We love these reputable brands:

-  [Icebreaker](#)
-  [Bridgedale](#)
-  [HumphreyLaw](#)
-  [Smartwool](#)





PREVENTING BLISTERS

Blistered feet are a common feature of multi-day walks, though they can be avoided with awareness and care. Broken blisters that are leaking fluid should be disinfected and bandaged. Small blisters that are not painful should be left alone because the best protection against infection is the blister's own skin. These will heal by themselves and will be reabsorbed in a few days. If you do have blisters, wash your feet in the evening to allow your feet to be fully dry when you dress them and set off in the morning.

The key to preventing blisters and avoiding unnecessary pain is to eliminate friction. Make sure you use good quality socks that you keep dry. If you feel a heat or friction spot developing, stop, take off your boots and inspect the cause. Apply a gel pad or tape to the friction spot on your foot or toes. The cushioned gel pad immediately reduces pain and promotes fast healing. You can even use them to prevent blisters.

CHOOSING TREKKING POLES

Trekking poles lessen the pounding on your precious joints and can help reduce muscle soreness. They will give you a feeling of security and balance on narrow or rocky trails and can help prevent ankle and knee injury on steep ascents and descents. This allows you to more fully appreciate the views around you. They are also helpful if you get tired or injured.

Trekking poles can be beneficial if you have had issues with sore knees, ankles or hips, or are not used to multi-day walking.

Trekking poles are not needed on all walks, especially if the terrain is fairly flat. They really come into their own on steep terrain.

Used correctly, trekking poles take between 10 and 15% of the load from your lower body and redirect that load to your shoulders and upper arms, meaning there is a more even load distribution over your frame. This will significantly help your joints, especially over an extended walk of several days.

If you suffer from arm or shoulder joint issues you may find that trekking poles exacerbate these. It's still worth trying poles, however, as you are likely to find the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

Trekking poles are good for burning extra calories as they make you exert yourself more than usual but they will not make you fitter. There are no short-cuts to getting walk-fit, so don't use them as a way to skimp on your training.



WHAT TYPE OF TREKKING POLES SHOULD I BUY?

You can spend a small fortune on trekking poles but it's not necessary. Cheaper poles will probably be more robust, and if you accidentally leave them behind on the trail, you won't be so upset. There are 3 main decisions to make when buying poles:

Do I want spring-loaded for shock absorption?

Spring-loaded shock-absorbing poles (such as the original Leki poles) are heavier than the 'normal' ones and are a little trickier to re-thread if they come undone. They are, however, very useful for people with particularly troublesome knee or ankle issues.

What type of locking mechanism do I want to hold my poles in place once I have extended them for use on a hill?

You will need to adjust the size of your poles when going from uphill to downhill and vice versa, so you need to be able to adjust your poles quickly and efficiently.

Generally, poles consist of three separate sections which slide down and fit together for ease of carrying, but can be extended for walking. Overall, we favour a simple metal or plastic lever at the two pole extension points because they are easier to use with cold/wet/gloved hands and often simpler to adjust if they start to get a bit loose.

However, trekking poles with the original twist-lock system are absolutely fine when you get used to the mechanism. We are not huge fans of the pop-up metal stud fastenings. They can be problematic in very cold weather and are a bit fiddly to use.

How tall am I and how long do I need my poles to extend to?

If you are tall be aware that some lightweight/compact poles only extend to 125cm (or sometimes even less!). Look for poles that extend to 130 or 135cm.





NUTRITION AND HYDRATION TIPS

What you eat and drink is just as important as your physical training. When you are training, a good diet can help you get the best fitness results.

During training it's a good idea to drink water and eat snacks so that you know how your body responds to food and fluid during activity.

HOW TO SUSTAIN ENERGY THROUGHOUT THE DAY

If you eat a varied diet and regularly throughout the day, you'll be able to keep your blood sugar within the normal range, giving you sustained energy during and after training. Good nutrition will also allow your body to recover and repair each day.

When you don't fuel your body properly, your blood sugar can plummet and you can experience a range of unpleasant symptoms, from a mid-morning/afternoon slump, to headaches, agitation and crankiness.

Preventing a sugar crash is fairly easy if you take greater care with your carb intake and change a few other habits, too. Focus on including a mix of complex carbohydrates, good fats and some protein.

Remember also that exercise can drag your blood sugar down, so you need to compensate for some of the calories your body is using up.

Here's our tips to help you sustain your energy levels while training.

Start with breakfast

Include protein and a little fat at breakfast, both of which delay the absorption of sugar into the blood, take longer to digest and make you feel fuller than eating carbohydrates alone. Try pairing orange juice with eggs, muesli or a dense wholegrain bread with peanut butter.

Take the same mix-and-match approach to lunch, dinner, and snacks

Meals with a combination of foods will create a slow, steady release of sugar into the bloodstream, keeping you on an even keel. Choose lean protein sources like turkey breast, fish, chicken, cottage cheese and legumes.

Don't let yourself get too hungry

Going hours without food sets you up for a sugar-heavy snack-fest. Try and eat every 2 to 3 hours. Snacks like nuts with dried fruit are easy to carry and will boost and sustain your energy levels.



Stay well hydrated

Dehydration can have a major effect on mood and exercise performance, so be sure to drink water before, during and after you exercise to stay well hydrated. People require different amounts of fluids during exercise and the best gauge is the colour of your urine. If this is concentrated – you are not drinking enough!

If you have dietary issues such as diabetes it's important to understand how your body performs under physical stress. If you have particular dietary requirements such as coeliac disease or being vegetarian, it is best to prepare for this and take packaged snacks from home so you can ensure you have a good supply for the road.

CARBS, FATS AND SUPPLEMENTS

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are the key to sustained energy when you are walking on a trail. Carbs will give you fast fuel, so eat wholegrains before your walk and snack on boiled eggs, bananas, protein balls, or trail mix. Your body only stores limited amounts of carbohydrates, so it's essential to replace them. Plan when you'll eat. It's often hard to replenish carbohydrates once you've 'hit the wall'.

Good fats

You only need a small amount of dietary fat, so you don't need to increase it during training. Not all fats are created equal. Avocado, nuts and seeds are a great source of good fats.

Green powder supplements

In an ideal world we would all eat organic food, drink purified water and breath clean air, but because we don't there is a place for green supplements in a healthy diet. Green powder supplements offer all the vitamins and minerals of a multi but with added nutrients such as probiotics, prebiotics and disease protective antioxidants. Green powders were once the domain of health-food stores, but you can now buy them in supermarkets and chemists. You need to take the recommended dose consistently to get any health benefits.

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