

Dining on the Trail

Healthy foods that are easy to carry and store are a must-have for hiking. There are a variety of healthy foods that can be taken along on your day hike. When you are on a long day hike, or an overnight hike, it is important that you take your meals along with you. You'll need nutrient-rich foods to give you the energy to keep hiking. 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 out 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. It is possible to keep perishable foods cold for a short period of time, so it is an option to bring them along when day hiking. If you are hiking overnight or for several days, perishable foods are not an option after the first day. Because you will have to carry your food, it is important that you take only what you need, and choose wisely when it comes to the weight of the foods and what is needed to prepare them.

Perishable Foods

If you are only on the trail for a day and can keep perishable foods cold, it is OK to take them along. You might choose things you would take on a typical picnic: sandwiches, salad, fruits, breads, and cheeses. Remember to consider the weights of the foods. To keep them cold, either freeze the foods overnight or store them with frozen water bottles, juice boxes, or cold packs.

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

- Research what type of cooking, if any, is allowed on the trail or park you are hiking. A campfire may not be an option in the area you are in.
- Keep cold foods cold. These foods are meant to be stored at 40 F or cooler.
- Don't leave these foods out for more than two hours, no more than one hour if the temperature is 90 F and above.
- Pack the foods safely. Raw meats and poultry should be well wrapped. Store them under ready-to-eat foods so that juices do not drip and ruin these foods.
- Take a meat thermometer. It can be difficult to see the color of the meat in limited sunlight such as the shade or at dusk. Use the thermometer to ensure that the food is cooked thoroughly. Ground beef should be cooked to 160 F. Chicken breasts should be cooked to 170 F, and legs and thighs should reach 180 F. Cook pork to 160 F and hot dogs to 165 F.



Shelf-Stable Foods

Foods that don't need to be cold are ideal options for hiking. Even though these foods don't need to be on ice, they still might be heavy to carry in your pack. Remember to bring only what you need. 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/dehydrated soups
- Jerky or dried meats
- Dried fruit
- Nuts and cereals
- Crackers
- Powdered milk or drink mixes
- Biscuit or pancake mixes
- Energy/protein bars



Pay attention to what is needed to prepare dried and powdered mixes. Consider the amount of water you need to bring along and preparations that might be involved. If the foods require cooking or baking, be sure to research what type of cooking, if any, is allowed on the trail or park you are hiking.

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 you are hiking for a few days 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 hike. You might also need it for cooking and preparing some of your dehydrated or powdered food products. Bring some bottled water along to drink. If you can't carry enough water to drink and cook, water from natural sources such as lakes and streams can be used, however, you must purify it. The best way to purify water is to boil it. If the water is muddy, first allow it to stand and let the particles settle to the bottom. Dip the clear water that has separated off the top and proceed with boiling it. Water should come to a rolling boil. Once it has reached this point, you should allow it to boil for at least one minute.

Water can also be purified using purification tablets and water filters. These products can be found at camping supply stores. It is important that if you use this method, that you use both the tablets and the filters. Both are needed to kill most bacteria, viruses, and parasites that might be present in the water.



Cleanup

It is important for the environment that nothing you take with you on a hike is left behind. This means all trash, as well as leftover food and scraps. Things such as disposable wipes are good options for some cleaning. Water sanitizing tablets and biodegradable camping soaps can also be used to clean dishes and can be found at camping supply stores. Use these items away from natural water sources, and dump dirty water away from fresh water.



Sources:

- United States Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service, **Food Safety While Hiking, Camping & Boating**, Fact Sheet, available online at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact%5FSheets/Food_Safety_While_Hiking_Camping_&_Boating/index.asp
- Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, **Food safety on the trails**, available online at <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/columncc/cc040727.html>

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