

It's All About Balance: Eat Smart, Move More, Rest Well

4 Smart Ways to Take a Hike

Walk smart with the right shoes and socks.

Happy feet are essential for happy hiking, especially for children. If you want children to grow up with a love of hiking, they need well-fitting shoes and breathable socks. Sturdy sneakers (with firm soles) can work for in-town walks and shorter hikes. But, kids need boots or trail shoes with good ankle support for longer hikes or rough paths. To avoid painful problems on a hike, try out shoes or boots (especially new ones) around the house before you hit the trail.

Be sun smart with lotions, clothes, hats and glasses.

Smart sun protection is all about layers. The first layer is a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher. Cover all skin that may be exposed with plenty of sunscreen. Reapply every two hours and after swimming. The next layer is loose-fitting clothing. Cover as much of your body as you can. The final layer is a wide brimmed hat and sunglasses that block 99-100% of UVA/UVB rays (check label). For more on sun-wise habits, visit www.epa.gov/sunwise/kids.html.

Enjoy plenty of smart beverages.

Staying hydrated is one of the keys to enjoying physical activity. Getting enough to drink will help you keep going and maintain a positive attitude. Refreshing water is your smartest bet. Sports drinks or powdered lemonade may be nice for those who won't drink enough plain water. A good rule of thumb is one quart every two hours for adults. You need more if you are in very hot, cold or dry weather.



Bring along smart trail food.

Eating right on the trail means having easy-to-eat, high-energy snacks to carry your body throughout the hike. Make sure that your trail treats are foods that travel well and that your hikers really like. Eating too little can lead to dizziness, nausea and cramps. Try some of these ideas: tuna (pop-top cans or pouches) on bagels or crackers; cheese (hard cheddar or string) with whole-wheat crackers; nuts and dried fruit; and beef jerky.

Looking for fun hikes in North Carolina? Check out the options online. Visit the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation at www.ncparks.gov. Pick the state park you want to visit. You can learn more about trails and hikes in that park. The site also has safety tips for hiking, so you will have what you need for outdoor situations. The best way to have a great hiking experience is to always be prepared for the worst.