

# 14 Packing Tips for the Perfect Backpack

Keep your pack simple. Buy gear with weight in mind. The weight of your pack impacts the quality of your trip.

Below are packing tips to lighten your load and make your first miles easier and more enjoyable.

## 1. Know exactly how to pack your pack

If you are a complete novice on how to arrange your gear in your pack, I recommend this video:

<https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/loading-backpack.html>

## 2. Get Organized

Before you leave, make an Excel spreadsheet of your gear's weight. This will give you a great estimate on how much your pack will weigh. Don't forget to add in weight for food and water!

## 3. Do NOT put important things at the bottom of your pack

If you're expecting rain, the last thing you want to deal with is digging through your pack for your rain jacket.

## 4. Replace

Before leaving for your trip, handle each item of your gear and evaluate its weight.

For example, I carried around a case for my glasses which was way heavier than the bubble wrap I replaced it with.

Replace your camp pillow with your stuff sack of clothes. Replace your Nalgene bottle with a Gatorade bottle or Platypus. Replace that heavy ceramic filter with [Aquamira](#) or [Sawyer](#). Ditch that heavy multi-tool for the smallest of [Swiss Army](#) knives. REPLACE!



No, just no.

## 5. Do NOT be afraid to ask for a shake down

Shake down (n) \ 'shāk- daŭn\

The process in which a meticulous, experienced, or eager gearhead sifts through one's entire backpack eliminating unnecessary or heavy pieces of gear while recommending lighter (unlikely cheaper) replacements.

If you are a northbound thru-hiker, you will come across your first outfitter at Neel's Gap in your first week. They offer shake downs for free!

## 6. Use a trash compactor bag as a pack liner

Trash compactor bags are thicker and less likely to rip which make them wonderful pack liners against the wet weather. I used a pack liner and a pack cover. The Appalachian Trail is wet, enough said.



## 7. Re-evaluate your first aid

I hate to admit this, but when I left for the trail my first aid was overflowing. You don't need 20 Band-Aids, ditch the bottles for your pills, and definitely stop carrying certain medications you can always wait to buy at the next town.

## 8. Ziplocs are your friend

I am serious. For my next thru-hike, Ziploc would be a fantastic sponsor. The money I spent on Ziplocs...

Anyway, I used Ziplocs for my food, electronics, first aid, wallet, trash, and other miscellaneous things. Replace your first aid sack or wallet with a zip lock. This will cut weight and make room.

## **9. If you haven't used it in a week, get rid of it!**

If you didn't touch your compass/machete/book in a week's time, you are simply carrying dead, useless weight!

This also goes for weekend warriors. If you didn't use a piece of gear for your weekend trip, consider leaving it behind next time.

## **10. Know the weight limit of your pack**

Don't use a lightweight backpack to carry a sixty pound load. You just won't have a good time. Overloading a pack is very common for new thru-hikers. Eliminate this mistake with Tip #3.



Do NOT overload your pack!

## **11. Do NOT carry the entire guidebook**

By the time you hit Virginia, your guidebook will be tattered and water-stained. If you must insist for keepsake purposes, remember Tip #6.

## **12. Step away from the canned food**

Canned food is ridiculously heavy and most is packed full of sodium. If you do insist on purchasing anything from a can, double bag the contents in Ziploc bags and eat the first night out.

## **13. Say Goodbye to Your Cat Hole Shovel/Trowel**

I can't believe I brought this! Sure, my shovel came in handy a few times but after I got Norovirus on the trail I ditched the bacteria infested utensil. Use your heel, a rock, a stick.

## **14. Do NOT put your water bladder (if you choose to have one) in your pack**

Stopping for water is a lot easier when you don't have to struggle to retrieve your bladder from inside your pack every time. I placed my bladder horizontally between the body and the very top part "the brain" of my backpack.