

Safe Hiking Tips from AppalachianTrail.com

- Avoid hiking alone because the “buddy system” is safer.
- If traveling with a group, never stray from the group.
- If hiking alone, pick a well traveled trail.
- Tell someone where you are going and when you will return.
- Don’t forget to check in with them when you get back.
- Stay on marked trails. Shortcuts and “bushwhacking” cause erosion and increase your chance of becoming lost.
- As you hike, pay attention to trail blazes (paint marks on trees) and landmarks. A double blaze indicates a change in trail direction or intersection. Be sure to follow the correct trail.
- Never climb on waterfalls. Many injuries and deaths occur on waterfalls and slippery, wet rocks.
- Always carry quality rain gear.
- Turn back in bad weather.
- If you become wet or cold, it is important to get dry and warm as quickly as possible, avoiding hypothermia.
- Dress in layers and avoid cotton. Many fabrics wick moisture, dry quickly or conserve heat. Experienced hikers often wear a lightweight shirt that wicks moisture, while carrying a fleece pullover and waterproof jacket in a daypack.
- All hikers should carry a whistle, which can be heard far away and takes less energy than yelling. Three short blasts is a sign of distress.
- Carry plenty of drinking water.
- Never assume stream water is safe to drink. You don’t know what is in the water upstream.
- Consider investing in a water filter or water purifying tablets at an outdoor supply store.
- Don’t count on cell phones to work in the wilderness, but if they do, be able to give details about your location. Telling rescue personnel that you’re lost by a big tree won’t help much as telling which trailhead you started from and how long you’ve been hiking.
- Don’t rely on a GPS to prevent you from getting lost. Batteries can die or the equipment can become damaged or lost. GPS units work much better in open fields than in thick woods.
- Invest in good hiking socks and boots.
- Avoid blisters by carrying “moleskin” — like felt that sticks to your skin — available at drug stores. Apply when you feel a hot spot on your feet.
- Wear bright colors.
- Don’t dress children in camouflage.
- Keep dogs on a leash because they sometimes become injured or lost too.