



Hiking Safety Tips

Numerous factors come into play if you want a safe hiking experience. Thunderstorms, lightning, a surprise snowstorm, dangerous wildlife, or maybe an unstable rock at the edge of a cliff, are only some of the hazards you could encounter while out on the trail. Having the proper gear, making sure you're in good physical condition, paying close attention to your surroundings, and using good judgment are all essential for a safe and enjoyable hiking trip.

Remember, only you will be responsible for your own safety!

The following are just a few hiking safety tips you may want to consider:

- * Never hike alone. Keep your hiking party together by hiking only as fast as the slowest member of your group. Always take into account the ability level of everyone in your group before choosing a hike.
- * If you're hiking with children, keep them in your sight at all times.
- * Give a family member or a friend your hiking itinerary and your estimated time of return. Make sure you check in with this person upon your return. If you don't return within the expected time, have them contact the local RCMP 250-723-2424
- * Always stay on the designated trail.
- * Don't hike too quickly. Pace yourself so you'll have enough energy for the home stretch.
- * Start your hike early so that you'll have plenty of time to enjoy it. This will also give you time to head back early enough so that you can finish your hike well before dark.
- * Check the weather forecast before heading out. Count on temperatures being cooler, and expect it to be windier in the mountains than in the lower elevations. Know what to do if lightning is in the area.
- * Take plenty of water with you, especially in the summer. If you plan on drinking water from the backcountry, know that it must be treated for Giardia lamblia. Giardia is a parasite that can cause an intestinal infection with a variety of symptoms. To avoid this infection, boil water for at least one minute or use a filter capable of removing particles as small as 1 micron.
- * Take a map and/or guide book with you. Use the map to keep track of your progress so that you know where you are at all times.
- * Liquids such as water or sports drinks are best for you. Drinking soda or alcohol while hiking will dehydrate you.
- * The best snacks for the trail are ones that will provide you with high energy, such as fruit, granola, peanut butter, bagels, power bars, fruit bars, GORP (trail mix), beef jerky, or even candy.
- * Learn First Aid and carry a first aid kit. Know what to do in case of an emergency. First aid training will teach you how to react and deal with specific types of injuries.
- * Know where to get medical care. Knowing the nearest hospital or clinic prior to an accident could save someone's life.
- * Hypothermia is the dangerous lowering of the body's core temperature. It results in physical collapse and a diminished mental capacity. You can help to avoid this situation by keeping dry. Even during the summer a wet hiker can succumb to hypothermia at the higher elevations. If your clothes do get wet, change into dry ones as soon as possible. Try to avoid sweating in cold weather by dressing in layers, rather than in a single bulky garment. Avoid cotton clothing. Always carry a wind-resistant jacket and rain gear, even on sunny days. As part of your first aid training you should know the signs of Hypothermia and what to do if someone in your party has these signs.
- * The Alberni Valley Community Forest can be very hot and dry in the summer. Watch for signs of heat exhaustion. As part of your first aid training you should know the signs of heat exhaustion and what to do if someone in your party exhibits these signs. To help avoid this situation, stay well hydrated. Always carry sunscreen and wear head protection, such as a baseball cap or a wide-brimmed hat. Read more tips for keeping your cool in the summer.
- * **Forest Fires.** There is a high hazard for forest fires in the Alberni Valley Community Forest. In the hot dry summer months extra care must be taken to stop human caused forest fires. Do not smoke in the forest when forest fire hazard is high or extreme. Obey camp fire bans when forest fire hazard is high or extreme. If you see a forest fire **phone 1-800-663-5555 or *5555 on most Cell Phones**
- * Wear sunglasses during any season of the year, especially at the higher elevations.
- * Wear boots that provide good ankle support.
- * Always have a fire source with you: waterproof matches or some other emergency fire starter.
- * Don't pack too heavy. Carry only what you need.
- * Carry a small flashlight or headlamp. Darkness arrives much quicker in the mountains. If you have trouble on the trail, you run the risk of finishing your hike in the dark.
- * If you get a blister or even a hot spot, you can relieve the pain and stop further damage by using moleskin or bandages. You can help prevent blisters by keeping your feet dry and changing your socks if they get wet. Read more here on taking care of your hiking feet.
- * Hiking sticks or trekking poles can help make your hike a little easier by reducing strain on your legs when going up or down slopes. They also help with stability on wet and icy trails.
- * When crossing a stream that is more than ankle-deep, wear shoes to protect your feet and use your hiking poles or a sturdy stick for support. Also, make sure you unbuckle any straps on your pack that are connected to your body so that the pack can be easily discarded if necessary. Don't attempt to cross a rain-swollen stream. Wait it out. The stream will likely begin to recede as soon as the rain stops.
- * If you plan on hiking at high elevations during the winter months you should expect the trails to be covered with snow and ice. Use crampons or other traction devices for your boots.
- * Though they may look cute and harmless, you should never approach a wild animal. Most injuries occur when people try to feed animals.
- * Black bears, wolves and Cougars live in the Alberni Valley Community Forest. They're wild and their behavior is unpredictable. It is good to review information on these animals on the Parks Canada web page and this will help provide you with a better understanding of what to do if you see one on the trail.

