

# HOW TO HIKE SAFELY WITH YOUR DOG



Any seasoned hiker who routinely hits the trail with a canine companion knows having their beloved dog along for the adventure elevates the experience. Enjoying the reward of stunning vistas during a long hike takes on an added measure of joy with your tail-wagging friend by your side. However, backcountry treks with your dog require an added measure of preparation and awareness. Read on for tips to follow before you hit the trailhead and during your hike so you and your furry best pal can make the most of your outing.

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## HOW TO PREPARE FOR A HIKE WITH YOUR DOG

There are several steps to take well before you lace up your hiking boots and attach your dog's leash. If possible, take a canine first-aid class. It's unlikely you'll need to utilize these skills, but you'll be really glad to have them in an emergency. Also, make sure your dog's vaccinations are current and he is treated routinely with a heartworm and flea/tick preventive before you expose him to the great outdoors.

Other important precautions and preparations:

- Make sure your dog has identification, preferably multiple sources. A properly fitted [personalized collar](#), identification and rabies hang tags, and a microchip (a small electronic I.D. chip your vet injects subcutaneously) together improve the chances of his safe return if you lose him on the hike.
- If your dog will wear a pack, practice at home first.
- Familiarize yourself with the regulations on the trail you'll be hiking. Most U.S. National Parks have tight restrictions on where dogs can hike, but some parks are pet-friendly. Most National Forests allow dogs on the trails.
- Investigate how rough the trail is, and opt for a shaded trail that's easy on the paws. Avoid sharp rocks, off-trail routes with steep drops, and hot floor surfaces. Avoid trails with heavy horse or mountain bike traffic. Avoid trails with ladders; never attempt to climb or descend one while carrying your dog.
- Make sure there is a safe water source where you're going, but also be prepared to treat your dog's water as well as your own: dogs are as susceptible to Giardiasis and other water-borne diseases as humans.

## WHAT TO PACK FOR YOUR HIKE

You'll need to fine-tune what you pack depending on the length of your hike and whether you're camping, but the following packing list is a good starting point for a day hike with you best pal:

- A short-to-moderate [heeling leash](#), preferably six feet in length, not to exceed ten feet. Some trails have regulations; check before you go. Avoid retractable leads. Thread your belt through the leash handle for hands-free hiking.
- Consider a [harness](#) for a dog who will remain leashed for the entire hike.
- Food, water, and treats. Consider adding Pedialyte to his water to combat dehydration; consult your vet. Give him [treats](#) formulated only for dogs.

**How much food and water?** Pack at least 50% more food than what your dog normally eats, and up to double his normal rations for a strenuous hike. Pack a quart of water for every three miles you plan to hike.

- Dog first-aid kit with accompanying guide. Include a muzzle—an injured dog can become aggressive.
- Dog booties. Sensitive paws may need help navigating a rough trail; booties will also protect your dog's pads from salted, slippery, or very cold terrain. Be advised that dogs sweat through their feet and can overheat if booties are left on too long.
- Poop bags and a trowel. If you are not burying your dog's waste according to LNT (Leave No Trace) principles, you'll need to double-bag it and pack it out with you. Before you go, find out the specific LNT requirements on the trail you plan to hike.

**Leave No Trace Rules:** Poop happens; you'll need to deal with it—canine or otherwise—using the proper LNT practices for the trail you're on. If you're not packing it out, dig a hole in an inconspicuous space at least 200 feet (70 paces) from water sources, trails, and your campsite. The hole should be 6 to 8 inches deep (4 to 6 inches in a desert environment) and 4 to 6 inches in diameter. After burying the waste, refill the hole with the original dirt and cover and disguise it with natural materials.

- A dog brush and/or comb, and a tick key. It's easier to deal with entangled seeds and other plant materials along the way, and to discover ticks before they embed. A tick must attach for 24 to 48 hours to transmit Lyme disease.
- A dog coat or vest for a short-haired indoor breed if you'll be outside in cold, wet conditions; choose one with belly coverage for hikes in the snow.
- A dog-specific personal flotation device (PFD) if you will be on a lake or river or plan to canoe.
- Insect repellent with DEET. Test with a small dab at home first and look for adverse reactions—drowsiness, lethargy, or nausea. Apply to areas your dog can't groom off: shoulders, neck, and around the ears, taking care to avoid the ears themselves and the inner ears specifically.
- Bear bells; attach one to his collar and one to your belt or shoes to reduce the chance of a bear encounter.

### Hiking with your Dog: Trail Safety and Etiquette

Without rules, anarchy reigns. It takes only a couple of dog-related incidents or expensive rescues to invite more dog restrictions on the trail. Observe a little wisdom and common sense to optimize your outing and keep everybody safe:

- Give your dog an opportunity for water whenever you take a drink, every fifteen minutes to half hour, depending on the difficulty of the hike and the temperature. Discourage your dog from drinking stagnant water on the trail and look instead for clear, running water. If your dog drinks salt water, encourage her to drink plenty of fresh water afterwards. Sanitize any water you get along the way with tablets or a portable water treatment system.
- Stay on the trail. Keep your dog on a leash that is ten feet in length or shorter.

**1:1** is the best dog-to-human ratio for a hike.

**2** is the maximum number of dogs to take on the trail with your group.

**3** dogs make a pack and can intimidate other hikers.

- Hikers without dogs have the right-of-way, always. Restrain your dog, step aside, and allow them to pass.
- If your dog is off-leash and another dog is coming, leash your dog. Allow them to sniff briefly and then be on your way.
- If your floppy-eared dog goes for a watery romp or swim, rinse out her ears afterwards.

When the adventure ends, give your pooch a final bumper-to-bumper exam and remove any unsavory stowaways on her. Once home, follow up with a thorough shampoo to rid her coat of oils from poisonous plants she may have picked up on the hike.

Then start planning your next big adventure. There is infinite fun to be had on the trail; the more often you take your beloved companion hiking and backpacking with you, the more seasoned and acclimated she'll become to outdoor adventure. Hike safely with your dog: you'll rock her world.