

The Ten Essentials

Carolyn Balling

In the 1930's, The Mountaineers, a Seattle hiking club, developed a list of "Ten Essentials for Hikers to Carry." The ten items were suggested to ensure mountain hikers could respond positively to an accident or emergency, and safely spend a night, or longer, out on the trail.

The original list of Ten Essentials included: map; compass; sunglasses and sunscreen (who knew they had sunscreen in the '30's?); extra clothing; flashlight; first aid supplies; firestarter; matches; knife; and extra food.

Over the years, the list has expanded to include basics, like water, and new technologies, and to adapt to regional differences and seasonal conditions. In fact, The Mountaineers now promote Ten Essential Systems to reflect a broader scope and number of items.

Whether items or systems, everything can be categorized by N-S-E-W, a handy hiker acronym, to help you remember what to include:

"N" stands for NAVIGATION supplies:

1. Map and compass.

At minimum, you need to carry a simple map of the area where you'll be hiking and the trails you plan to follow. Since you may change your mind about your route once you're out there, you need more than a mental list of the trail signs to follow. A map will show you trail choices, junctions, and what the area offers. Many parks provide only rudimentary maps. If you have a more detailed map, or even pictures, to show landmarks, contours and other details, bring that. Keep your map in a plastic case, or a simple Ziplok bag, to keep it dry.

A compass is a valuable tool--for those who know how to use one. Learn to use a compass with a map before you begin carrying one. These days, many people carry a GPS system instead of a compass. As with a compass, you need to know how to use it, to mark your route, and to figure out how to get back on track, for it to be helpful in emergency situations.

"S" is for SAFETY-related equipment:

2. First aid supplies

Every hiker needs to carry a personal first aid kit, to deal with minor incidents like cuts, scratches, blisters, and stings. Pocket-sized first aid kits can be purchased at any outdoor supplier or large drug store, or you can assemble your own. Basic contents include:

adhesive bandages

sterile gauze pads
 gauze roll
 adhesive tape for attaching gauze
 antiseptic
 elastic bandage
 a bandana or two or triangular bandage
 scissors
 tweezers
 pen/pencil and paper
 whistle or mirror for signaling for help

Also helpful to carry are an instant ice pack (in a plastic container in case it leaks), a CPR mouth barrier and a pair of latex gloves, for protection from blood or other bodily fluids. As with a compass or GPS device, the knowledge and certification on how to use the CPR device and perform CPR need to come along with the equipment.

In addition to standard first aid supplies, I recommend that our team members carry any personal medication they need during a day, reading glasses if they can't read a map without them, emergency contact information, their health insurance card and a photo ID, and cash or a credit card.

3. Waterproof matches or disposal lighter, and firestarter

A means of starting a fire is also part of safety. Although not critical for short duration hikes, to be prepared for a longer stay it makes sense to tuck these items in the pack.

4. Repair items

A Swiss army knife or multi-tool can be used in a wide variety of situations. On a simpler level, safety pins and duct tape are also handy tools. An easy way to carry duct tape is to wrap a few feet of it around a trekking pole or water bottle.

5. Instant safety shelter

A mylar "space" blanket can work as a simple shelter, and double as a signaling device. Plastic ponchos or extra large trash bags can serve as emergency shelters, too.

6. Illumination

A small flashlight, or headlamp, along with extra batteries and a bulb, can work to signal others or guide the way if darkness finds you still on the trail.

"E" essentials relate to keeping up your ENERGY:

7. Food is a must. Even for short hikes, you'll want a simple snack like gorp or an energy bar. Longer hikes require a lunch as well as trail snacks. Having more with you than you expect to use covers your needs in case your hike takes longer than planned.

8. Water is even more critical to your health than food. Hydration daypacks make it easy to carry 2-3 liters, generally enough for a full day hike. As with food, carry more than

you expect to need for your outing, especially on hot, dry or humid days. If you're hiking in places with water sources, bringing along a way to treat water for drinking would be a good idea for longer hikes.

Finally, there's the "W" for WEATHER-RELATED items:

9. Think insulation. Think **extra layers** of lightweight, wicking clothing, such as rain gear, gloves, a stocking cap, and other cold and wind protection for the worst conditions you can realistically expect. Many hikers like to carry extra socks to change into during the day, especially if stream crossings or rainy weather is likely on the hike. Those extra socks can serve as mittens, if needed, if temperatures drop.

10. **Sun protection** includes a hat with a brim, sunglasses, SPF 15+ sunscreen and lip balm. Wearing shirts with short or long sleeves, instead of tank tops or other sleeveless tops, provides sun protection as well, especially shirts made with SPF fabrics.

You may not use all Ten Essentials on every hike. It's always better to have things you don't use than to be caught empty handed in a time of need. Keep your Ten Essentials in your pack so you're always prepared and ready to go. Be sure to bring your common sense with you every time you hike, too.