

Safety Suggestions from The McCall Hiking Club

1. Take your time. While hiking, take your time. Start hiking with short low elevation gain hikes and work up to longer, higher elevation gains. STOP if you feel out of breath. Never push yourself. Remember you are climbing, sometimes at great elevations. Enjoy the beauty that surrounds you.

Altitude sickness can cause headache, nausea and even life-threatening pulmonary edema. Hike at your own pace.
Never try to "keep up" with faster hikers.

2. Never hike alone. Always leave word with someone, even for a day hike, where you are going and what time you should return. Even the most experienced in the backcountry have been lost and their friends, loved ones and search professionals do not know where to begin to search, losing valuable time.

3. Know the symptoms of hypothermia. Hypothermia is a lowering of body temperature in cold and wet conditions, which can cause death. An uncovered head can lose up to 50 percent of the body's heat at 40 degrees fahrenheit and up to 75 percent at 5 degrees fahrenheit. Persistent shivering is the first danger sign. Confusion and stumbling are more serious signs. Dress in layers for hiking. Be prepared for cold weather. Be aware that weather in the mountains can change quickly.

4. Know the symptoms of dehydration. A lack of water kills much sooner than starvation. If you plan on doing a lot of hiking, invest in a water filter such as a Micro Lite. To purify water, boil at a full rolling boil for five minutes. Using iodine drops kills bacteria but takes 30 minutes and will not kill Giardia Lamblia. Giardia is not serious but will make you miserable. Diarrhea is the symptom. Never drink from streams or lakes no matter how clear they look. Dehydration will cause delirium. Symptoms are thirst, slow motion, lack of appetite, drowsiness and a high temperature. Carry extra water in your vehicle.

5. Check for ticks. Ticks look like small watermelon seeds. Examine yourself after every hike, even if it is a short one. Ticks usually crawl around for several hours before they start to bite. When they do bite, they burrow painlessly into the skin. Pull gently with tweezers, using care to prevent breaking off the head. If you find a large patch of red skin, a few days after a hike, consult a doctor. Ticks carry Lyme disease, which can be a serious disease if not diagnosed quickly; however, only a few known cases have occurred in Idaho.

6. Watch for mine shafts and tunnels. There are old mine shafts and tunnels in Idaho's back country -- watch for them. Some shafts may be hidden in the ruins of old cabins.

7. Be aware of poison ivy and poison oak. Poison ivy appears mainly in the desert climates of Idaho (eg near Riggins). Poison oak grows only along the Pacific Coast.

8. Know how to address sunstroke. Sunstroke is life-threatening. Immerse the person in cold water or cover with cool, wet cloths. Symptoms are lack of sweating, temperature over 105 degrees, hot dry skin and possible unconsciousness. To prevent sunstroke, drink plenty of water (even before feeling thirsty) and wear a hat.

9. Know how to address heat exhaustion. Heat exhaustion symptoms are: pale, moist cool skin, low body temperature, faintness and even vomiting. Drink lightly salted water and lie down and rest.

10. Be bear aware. We do have bears in the Payette national Forest. If you see a bear: give it room, walk slowly and talk calmly to it. Avoid confrontation. Odors attract bears. Keep food sealed in bags. In certain situations, dropping your fanny or back pack and backing away slowly may save you from attack by a bear since they are frequently more interested in the lunch in your pack than in you. LEAVE YOUR PETS AT HOME. Dogs can antagonize wild animals and even bring the bear back to you.

11. Snakes. Snakes are not found often in the mountains, typically only in the desert at elevations lower than 5,200 feet.

12. Make noise while hiking. Whistle, sing, talk to your partner. Animals don't like to be surprised by us any more than we like to be surprised by them and your noise is a good warning signal.

13. Water crossings. When crossing a stream keep your boots and socks on your feet. Use two sticks to help you with balance. Rocks can be very slippery. Never cross a river.

14. Use the buddy system. Never leave a hiker alone on a trail. Use the buddy system.

17. Fork drops. At a fork in the trail have someone stay to show the slow hikers which way the group has gone.

Hike sensibly in the mountains and return safely!