

# Step into it

*Fun and fitness with hiking*

by Capt. Christine L. Kunz  
photo by Tech. Sgt. Kevin Gruenwald

## Did you know?

"For a 170-pound person, a half-hour of hiking will likely burn 245 calories."  
— Capt. Cliff Moore,  
health promotion manager  
for the Health and Wellness Center  
at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas

The sky is clear blue, and there's not a cloud around. The only sound is chirping birds. And the temperature outside is not too hot, not too cold. It's bad enough the majority of Airmen have jobs indoors, but on a day like this, why would anyone exercise inside as well?

This year there's more of an emphasis on getting fit and remaining fit, and one of the key components of maintaining a regular exercise regime is varying your workouts. Instead of going to the base gym every day, why not exercise in the great outdoors? Join the more than 70 million others who have found that hiking not only

improves fitness, but also gives them a fun, exhilarating experience. "There is beauty everywhere," said Ed Talone, a trail instructor with the American Hiking Society. "Every state is different, and no two hikes are ever the same."

According to the American Hiking Society, hiking usually refers to "extended walks in the natural world — in the mountains or wilderness." But with a growing system of trails, more Americans can hike near their homes. There are two basic categories of hikes: day hikes, which are close to home and require little equipment, and extended overnight hikes, which need more experience, preparation

and specialized equipment.

"The easiest part about hiking is the freedom to do it anytime and almost anywhere," said Capt. Maiya Kraus, bioenvironmental engineer at Hill Air Force Base, Utah. "Hiking is a lifetime sport and something you can enjoy for the rest of your life." She started hiking at an early age with her parents and currently hikes about two to four times a month.

Outdoor recreation centers on every Air Force base offer equipment rentals, items to purchase and information pertaining to outdoor activities. You may find a few things there to start your first hike.

However, Mr. Talone recommends

contacting a local area hiking group before setting off on a hike to find possible companions and to learn your hiking areas' level of difficulty.

"Local groups tend to do gentle, beginning hikes, and most of the people there are not experts but ordinary people starting out as well," he said. "There will always be someone in a group who fits your style of hiking. All you have to do is pick up the local weekend newspapers to find them."

The amount of exercise generated from a hike depends on the type of hike and terrain. A two-day overnight backpack trip with a 25-pound pack will certainly burn more calories than

a 5-mile roundtrip hike on a nature trail.

"The minute you start walking, you're a hiker," Mr. Talone said. "You just need to like walking and go do it."

So next time the sun is shining and the birds are calling, go outside to broaden your exercise routine.

"Hiking transcends the drudgery of exercise by providing a constant distraction. You'll have sights to see, routes to find and birds to watch," said Maj. Derek Varble, assistant professor of history at the Air Force Academy who has been hiking since 1975. "Your workout becomes fun rather than a chore." ☺

## Want more info?

For more information on hiking, go to [www.americanhiking.org](http://www.americanhiking.org) or [www.outdoorplaces.com](http://www.outdoorplaces.com).



## Equipment start-up

According to Ed Talone, a trail instructor with the American Hiking Society and avid hiker since 1983 while logging more than 40,000 miles, the basic gear required for hiking is sturdy footwear and a simple backpack or day pack. Other essentials could include appropriate clothing for the weather, a small first aid kit, plenty of water and snacks. Equipment varies based on models and cost, but essentially one can begin hiking with clothing already found at home and something to carry a few extra items.

■ **Footwear:** The American Hiking Society says that "the proper shoe is vital to any walking or hiking activity." Avoid blisters by choosing properly sized and fitted shoes — choose boots about half a size larger than your regular size. Also try wearing synthetic fiber socks because they reduce friction and draw moisture away from the skin. The newest option in footwear is trailrunning shoes, designed for day hiking and short overnight trips. Prices range from \$35 for trailrunning shoes to \$165 for insulated, waterproof hiking boots.

■ **Day pack or backpack:** The right day pack or backpack is essential. Packs vary in size and fit; buy one that's suitable for the type of hiking you'll be doing. A day pack, also known as a knapsack, is the most commonly seen and used backpack. Look for padded shoulder straps and back for added comfort. The fabric should be durable and weatherproof with a leather bottom for extra reinforcement. There are backpacks with internal and external frames, but these are much larger than day packs and are generally used for more serious hiking and overnight camping. Prices range from \$25 for a waistpack or day pack to \$300 for an internal-framed backpack.

■ **Other essentials:** If hiking for a full day, the American Hiking Society recommends additional essentials like snack food, water, maps or guides, a compass, a small first aid kit, a pocket knife, a flashlight, sunscreen and appropriate clothing for all weather possibilities.

— Capt. Christine L. Kunz