

# HEALTHY LIVING



## Take a Hike!

What is so enticing about hiking? Perhaps it is the sense of freedom while heading toward a wondrous destination; or soaking in the vast beauty of nature as you do something healthy and fulfilling; or maybe it is inhaling clean, fresh air while shedding stress and toxic buildup from days working and living indoors.

When hiking, you might take a turn and suddenly gaze upon a surprise of nature: The sun shining through the leaves of a forest, a lake hidden in the snow-capped mountains or the multitude of colors displayed along a desert of rock and sand. You might stumble upon an unfamiliar flower or a regal creature into whose territory you have wandered. Hiking offers refreshing peace and stillness amidst an almost constant rush of discoveries, large and small.

The benefits of hiking are numerous: It lowers the risk of heart disease, boosts bone density, builds muscle and core strength, improves balance, helps to control weight and improves mood.<sup>3</sup> It has even been found to improve learning, cognition, memory and creativity.<sup>1</sup>

Research suggests being exposed to nature also can improve higher-order cognitive functions such as selective attention, problem-solving, inhibition, and multi-tasking. While multimedia usage is constantly utilizing these functions, the restful introspection induced by natural stimuli seems to replenish the brain's ability to perform them.<sup>2</sup>

If you are new to hiking, the American Chiropractic Association (ACA) offers a few tips to get you started:

### Tips for a Productive Hike

- Beginners should start on a flat surface. Gradually increase inclines with hills and then proceed to mountains. Ascending and descending inclines burns more calories and improves balance and core strength.<sup>3</sup>
- Add some weight to your backpack, such as plenty of water, some healthy snacks and an emergency kit. The added weight improves back muscle strength and burns more calories.<sup>3</sup>
- For higher elevations, consume more carbohydrate-dense foods and fewer fats and proteins. Carbohydrates require less oxygen for energy production. At higher elevations it is important to conserve as much oxygen as possible.
- Plan ahead. Know what the terrain and weather will be like. Wear comfortable clothes and supportive shoes with traction depending on the terrain and weather. Using hiking poles on inclines is a fantastic way to exercise the upper body while reducing strain on the hip and knee joints and muscles.<sup>4</sup>

In short, if you want to improve your physical and mental health while having fun, just take a hike!

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### References:

1. Sleiman, SF et al. Exercise promotes the expression of brain derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) through the action of the ketone body B-hydroxybutyrate. *Elife*, 2016; 5:e15092. <https://elifesciences.org/articles/15092>.
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3. Robinson KM. How Hiking Is Good for Body and Mind. *WebMD Magazine*, 2013. <https://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/features/hiking-body-mind>.
4. Friday Health Plans. Why Is Hiking So Freaking Good for You? April 16, 2019. Accessed June 7, 2020. <https://www.fridayhealthplans.com/hiking-is-so-good-for-you>.



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