

Survival Skills

ten essentials



It can happen to anyone who enjoys the outdoors. It happens slowly and silently. The sequence of events is the same but the outcomes are different with each story.

Hikers set out on a short trek. They veer off the trail and slowly lose their sense of direction. They tell themselves, “I think the trail is over here,” “I’ll keep on walking” and “This looks familiar.” After awhile, the hikers realize that they are lost. Panic sets in. The sun is setting and they are not prepared to spend the night outdoors. Battling hypothermia and exhaustion, they keep moving. As the sun rises they finally find their trail and soon they are back at the car. Dehydrated and tired, the hikers are lucky to be alive.

This happened to a friend mine. When she told me about it, I took the opportunity to share with her the ten essential items that I always pack when hiking:

- Knife
- Water
- Food
- Map and compass
- Headlamp
- Cord
- Proper clothing for the outing
- Sunscreen
- Matches or lighter
- Basic medical kit

I keep these items in a small day-pack for easy access. My backpack is always ready to go when nature beckons me. While it may seem like somewhat of a burden to carry these things around, it can truly be the deciding factor between life and death. None of us go out into the wilderness planning to get hurt or lost but just in case, we should always carry our ten essential items! Before setting out on the trail, I make sure I have the ten essential items stashed in my day pack. Some of these items may seem self-explanatory but it is important to know why each item has been chosen and how they benefit the outdoors person.

Water: This is an item that should always travel with you. On hot days, one 20 oz. bottle will not do for a three hour hike. I load up on water by carrying two 32 oz. Nalgene bottles with me. The general rule of thumb for water is 1 quart of water every hour during heavy, sustained activity in hot conditions. Temperature and activity level will dictate how much water you will need to bring.

Sun screen: Now more than ever, putting on sunscreen is an essential part of going outdoors. Protecting the body’s largest organ from harmful UV rays prevents the outdoors person from dealing with the painful reality of sunburn. The longer you are outdoors, the higher the SPF

rating should be. Don't forget the nose, ears and lips when applying your protection. If you want to pull double-duty, some sunscreens come with bug repellent mixed in.

Proper Clothing: Before heading out on your hike, check the weather forecast for the area you will be exploring. This will help dictate how you will dress for the day. Some people get so excited to hear that a clear day is ahead of them that they rush out into the woods with just the clothes on their backs and forget that they will encounter cooler conditions as the day progresses. Carry a light-weight fleece to bring you comfort as the night approaches.

Food: Choosing the right food for your time outdoors will keep the belly full and the body energized for the trip. Power bars are a good choice because they are small and light. Remember not all power bars are created equal. Check the total calories, protein, and carbs when choosing a bar for your activity. If this is not your style, GORP is a time-tested food that can't be beaten.

Cord: Parachute cord or Mil-spec braided 550 test nylon is a multipurpose item that is made up of a strong woven outer layer that houses seven smaller bundles of threads. Each inner core strand has a minimal tensile strength of 30 lbs. This cord can be used to string up a tarp or bundle up wood for a fire. The small, inner strands can be used

for sewing. At least 100 ft. should be carried in the pack.

Medical kit: Medical kits come in all shapes and sizes. No matter what size you choose, remember it is important to know how to use the contents in an emergency. Read the instructions and be familiar with what is in each compartment of the kit. If an injury needs more than disinfection and a Band-Aid, knowing how to give quick and diligent care can get the injured back on their feet.

Knife: If you are choosing a knife to put in your pack, consider the following. First, choose a brand name that has been proven in the field. There are many cheap knock-offs that break with very little use. Secondly, make sure it fits comfortably in your hand and that it has a lock blade. I use a Swiss army rucksack, which has a lock blade and a saw that has come in handy on countless occasions.

Matches/fire starting: Waterproof matches are essential to have in your pack. You can also carry dryer lint in a film canister for some dry tinder. I also bring a small lighter. Having a back up in rainy conditions can be a blessing on a cold night out!

Map and Compass: In an age of GPS technology, why take a map and compass with you? The simple fact is that GPS units run on batteries and technology can fail. I have been out

deep in the forest and my GPS unit does not pick up signals because of tree cover and topography. Knowing how to navigate with a map and compass will ensure that you make it back out of the woods without getting lost.

Headlamp: Old halogen light bulbs and heavy batteries are a thing of the past. LED technology has emerged, offering more burn time and light than its older predecessors. The new headlamps often have three power settings, as well as blinking lights to use as signals.

As the seasons change, so should the items in your pack. For example, when colder night time temps are below 50 degrees, a Mylar emergency blanket will help fight off hypothermia and extra food will keep your body warm. Temperature, activity level, and time spent outdoors will dictate how you will organize your survival items before hitting the trail. 🏕️

–Shawn Grose