

Going for a walk - tips and ideas



Taking a walk or hike can be a fun way to get exercise, fresh air, spend time with family, or have time to yourself. It has been shown that time spent outdoors is good for people of all ages, it helps with brain development in young children, and can help adults and kids deal with stress and anxiety. A hike doesn't have to always be a grand adventure over mountains but can sometimes just be a simple walk near home, at a local preserve or wildlife management area, and sometimes even in your own backyard.

Getting Started- It's Easy!

Who: all ages (young children should have supervision)

Where: any outdoor area that is safe and you are allowed to be

Materials: Wear appropriate clothing and footwear for being outside in the weather and on the type of terrain where you are walking. It's also a good idea to have sunscreen, bug spray, water bottle, a first aid kit. Optional: bring binoculars, bug jar, or a nature notebook, etc. (just don't bring more than you want to carry)

Length of time: 30 minutes- 1 hour, or more, it's up to you

***Note* Know where you are going, have a map if possible, and keep an eye on the weather. Make sure someone knows where you are going and when you will return- even a phone call buddy. Always stay on marked trails and follow preserve rules and guidelines. For more safety tips see the [You Alone in the Maine Woods](#) pocket guide available online.**

Let's Begin:

Pick a destination that will be fun to explore or a place that you just like to visit. Gather up your gear. Dress for the weather. Let someone know where you are going and when you will be back, and head out.

Different types of walks/hikes:

Leisure walk/ hike- Sometimes you just need to get some fresh air or exercise. Make sure to have good foot wear, dress for the weather, and make sure to practice safe hiking. This type of hike is great on a lunch break, early morning, after work, or on the weekend.

Hiking with kids- choose a destination that is not too steep or challenging, keep in mind kids love to stop and explore. Sometimes a trail or area that has small, shallow streams or ponds, or a trail that goes through more than one habitat are good for exploring with kids.

* You may want to make sure to have a small jar or magnify glass to look at things like small bugs, lichens or other discoveries up close and safely. Always return the small bugs safely to their homes.

- Log/ leaf litter search- carefully flip over small logs, rocks, or look under the fallen leaf litter to look for what tiny creatures may live there. You could find slugs, spiders, sow bugs, millipedes, centipedes, salamanders, or something else.
*Handle each creature with care for yourself and the creature, use a small clean container for holding and viewing briefly before returning the creature. Always put the log/rock back how you found it and then put the creature down beside it and cover with a few loose leaves. Allowing the creature to crawl back on its own keeps it from being squished when you put the log/ rock back.

Sensory/ Mindfulness Hike (adults or kids)- Sometimes we just need to all feel a closer connection to nature and escape the modern world, one way to do this is immerse yourself into nature by focusing on some of your different senses.

Here are some ways to go about this mindful practice:

- **Listen-** As you are walking try to focus on the sounds you hear and notice how they might change as you walk along. Stop for a moment in a safe location and either sit or stand to the side of the trail and close your eyes, this will heighten your sense of hearing and allow you to focus more on the sounds of the forest, pond, beach, meadow, etc.
*With children you may have to guide them more and give them a 30 second or 60 second goal to listen quietly and point when they hear something.
- **Touch-** As you walk reach out, when safe to do so, and feel different textures or nature. The sense of touch can really help you physically connect with nature. Feel different types of tree bark from the smooth white birch to the rough oak. Brush your hand gently across lichen covered rocks and branches, along ferns, and on mosses, just be sure not to accidentally pick anything living. Feel the cool or warmth of the rocks and soil.
*Be careful and use your best judgement, make sure to avoid poison ivy, thorns, and other such plants. When touching surfaces keep in mind to clean your hands as necessary.
- **Smell-** You might not always find strong smells but sometimes when you lean in close to something you find it has an odor all its own- damp soil after a rain, tree branches and saps, flowers, swamps, fields, forests, etc.
*Always be careful to not get too close and make sure you know what you are smelling before you lean in.
- **Watch-** Look around you as you walk or when you stop. Pay attention to the swaying trees, the flying birds, look for small creatures in the trees you pass, look for signs of wildlife that was once there- woodpecker holes, chewed branches, etc. Sometimes it is good to even sit and watch one small patch of habitat from top to bottom for a few minutes and see what happens when we are still.

Bird/ Wildlife Walk (adults or older kids) Take a walk with the purpose of trying to safely watch wildlife from a distance. For these hikes it is often best to leave your dog home as even the nicest dog still seems like a predator to many species and you may see less animals otherwise.

Items to bring and consider:

- Binoculars to allow safe viewing from a distance and not disturb the wildlife
- Notebook or smartphone to record your observations/ make a list
- Field guide for the wildlife you are looking for
- Camera or other recording device to take record or to help with identification later
- Wear clothes that are not as vibrant so you blend in to the habitat and don't alarm wildlife
- Walk and talk softly as to not scare wildlife away
- If the animal is looking right at you may be too close and should slowly back away and view from a distance where the bird or other wildlife will behave more naturally

Additional Activities to Try with Take a Hike

Find a Sit Spot

Keeping a Nature Notebook

Scavenger Hunts (one for every season)

Sound Mapping

This Nest is a Mess

Tree Trust Walk