

The Ten Essentials for Hiking/Backpacking

by John Klebes

The "Ten Essentials" is a list of items that can save your life in the event of an outdoor emergency. In the 1930s, the Mountaineers, a Seattle-based hiking, climbing, and conservation organization, came up with a list of 10 essential items that no climber should be without. The list started showing up in training programs in the 1940s and 1950s, and has since become the standard starting point for hikers to guard against the unexpected.

Over the years this list, and many similar lists, have been passed on to new hikers as an essential insurance policy against the unexpected. You will not use these items on every trip but at some point during your hiking adventures you will be glad you have them along.

1. **Map** - A map not only tells you where you are and how far you have to go, it can help you find campsites, water, and an emergency exit route in case of an accident or foul weather.
2. **Compass** - and the ability to use it. A compass can help you find your way through unfamiliar terrain—especially in bad weather where you can't see the landmarks. Of course, it will not do much good if you don't know how to use it so take the time to learn some map and compass skills.
3. **Water** - and a way to purify it. Without enough water, your body's muscles don't perform as well: You'll be susceptible to hypothermia and altitude sickness, not to mention the misery of raging thirst. Bring a minimum of 2 quarts and it's a good idea to carry a purification system such as iodine tablets or a filter to re-supply should you run short.
4. **Extra Food** - Any number of things could keep you out longer than expected: a lengthy detour, getting lost, an injury, difficult terrain. A few ounces of extra food will help keep up energy and morale, and feed your internal furnace to ward off hypothermia.
5. **Rain Gear and extra clothing** - Because the weather can change at anytime, especially above treeline, bring along extra layers. You should avoid cotton, and always carry a hat.
6. **First Aid Kit** – and the knowledge to use it. In addition to the basics you should also include moleskin or blister care kit, and include an extra day's worth of any medications you are taking or might need in an emergency. Also, allergy and bee sting kits if you need them. At least one person in the group should have a larger kit that includes a SAM split to immobilize a broken bone. Remember to replace anything you use during a trip so you have it again for the next trip. (Some people also include things like a little rope, safety pins, needle and thread, and duct tape to make emergency repairs)

7. **Flashlight** - or headlamp, with spare bulb and batteries. For finding your way in the dark and signaling for help. I like to bring a very small, spare flashlight instead of spare bulb and batteries. This way you don't have to try and change a bulb in the dark, and if you lose your main light you have a spare.
8. **Pocketknife** - A pocketknife is the most useful tool you can own. It can cut strips of cloth into bandages, remove splinters, and perform a whole host of repairs on malfunctioning gear — not to mention cut cheese and open cans.
9. **Waterproof Matches** - and Firestarter. The warmth of a fire and a hot drink can help prevent an encounter with hypothermia. And fires are a great way to signal for help if you get lost.
10. **Sun Protection** – such as sunscreen, lip balm, and sunglasses. Especially above treeline when there is a skin-scorching combination of sun and snow, you'll need sunglasses to prevent snowblindness, and sunscreen to prevent sunburn.

Other Essentials - As with any list, everyone has their favorite additions. Here's mine:

- High intensity whistle
- Insect Repellent
- Note pad and pen or pencil
- Emergency blanket or a few plastic garbage bags
- 50' of cord
- Toilet Paper

Hike Participant's Responsibilities:

In addition to the "Ten Essentials" each participant must take the responsibility of assessing his/her own abilities against the intended activity. Proper clothing, footwear, gear, etc. must be used to ensure adequate safety and comfort for all. If you have any questions about a trip, please call the trip coordinator for further information. Your preparation will ensure a safe and enjoyable trip for all. Enjoy the great outdoors safely.

