

HIKING FOR HEALTH

'In all things of nature, there is something of the marvelous' —Aristotle

BY ANN C. SHULTZ

Looking for a sport that delivers a terrific all around workout while you enjoy the beauty of nature? Try hiking. You'll discover a sport that offers more than just exercise and that can be enjoyed by people of all ages.

Hiking opens the door to amazing sights — mountain creeks, fields of wildflowers, magnificent coves and shorelines. Many of the world's most breathtaking sights exist in more remote locations. You have to hike to see them.

Hiking is a wonderful escape from the world's busy pace. As a stress reliever, it's hard to beat. Troubles disappear as you rest beside an alpine lake or stare in wonder at a waterfall that plunges

a hundred feet from the mountains above. And studies have shown that hiking releases endorphins, natural tranquilizers, and adrenaline which if not released causes muscle tension and feelings of anxiety.

In addition to providing emotional and psychological benefits, hiking offers many other health benefits. It's a high-intensity, low-impact workout that gets the heart pumping and the blood flowing. According to the American Heart Association, a person of average weight can burn 240 calories hiking for an hour at a comfortable 2 MPH. Calories burned increase with uneven terrain, high altitude and a brisker pace. Hiking can aid in the prevention of heart disease, hypertension and diabetes. It's an effective weight bearing exercise that prevents osteoporosis by increasing bone density. And it builds muscle strength and agility.

Lifelong family activity

Hiking can be enjoyed by the whole

family. Here's an opportunity to open your kids' eyes to the beauty of the outdoors and teach them to respect and cherish nature. Starting your kids hiking is one way to counteract the sedentary lifestyle of TV and video games. Take along a book on wildflowers or birds, and make a game out of identifying the ones you see on the trail. Many trails are pet-friendly so include the family dog as well.

And hiking is a sport you can enjoy your whole life. You'll find hikers of all ages in the outdoors. Particularly impressive are the number of seniors who stay fit and lean by continuing their passion for hiking into older age.

Getting started

It's surprisingly easy to get started hiking. Begin by purchasing sturdy boots. A good pair of beginning boots should cost you no more than \$80 (less on sale), well worth the money. Many trails include different types of terrain — climbing up steep paths, traversing streams and creeks and descending rocky slopes. If the weather is wet and damp, trails can become slippery. Good boots provide balance and traction and prevent twisted knees and ankles.

A few tips to keep in mind when picking out your first pair. For starters, push your foot all the way up in the boot. When you flex your ankle your heel shouldn't slide up more than half an inch. When you kick something lightly, your toe shouldn't bang against the front of the boot. Break new boots in before hitting the trail. Take short walks a couple of weeks before to ensure that you don't end up with blisters on your first hike. Wear thick hiking socks that will cushion your

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complete the work in a fraction of the time, while you relax. If you find the hustle and bustle of the season makes it difficult for you to unwind, consider this an investment in your own health and well-being.

Kitchen remedies

7 SIMPLIFY YOUR HOLIDAY COOKING

The grand holiday feasts we remember from childhood came complete with a turkey, the trimmings and every home-baked goody in your grandmother's recipe file. But for most of us today, standing over a hot stove is no way to relax.

One family I know cooked their turkey four days before Christmas. The meat was cooled, sliced and placed in plastic freezer bags. On Christmas Day the chef put the aroma of roasting turkey back in the house by cooking a single turkey thigh on top of a casserole of stuffing. Platters of microwaved turkey were served piping hot to hungry guests with fresh gravy and the traditional side dishes. The cook had more time to spend with the family.

You can also do some of your cooking during the party, and get your guests involved. Of course, you want everyone to relax and enjoy the occasion. But involving friends in the last-minute preparations can bring people together in an even closer spirit of sharing.

8 LIMIT YOUR HOLIDAY MENU We all want to make our holiday parties memorable. But every year, the list of family-favorite recipes grows longer. Any deviation from our past menus seems, at first, unthinkable.

Instead, try alternating your best recipes from year to year. This season make use of the deli and bakery sections of your local market for some of your basic party foods. Feature one or two of your specialties alongside them. This gives each year's menu a distinctive stamp. Your guests will look forward to the holidays with anticipation to see which family specialty you will serve.

Last-minute stress relievers

9 TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF If your holiday tradition includes many Christmas Eve activities, consider taking the day off from work. This may be difficult

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if you are in retail sales or a service-related job for which December is a busy month. But if you provide your supervisor advance notice, your boss may be willing to accommodate your request.

You may also be reluctant to take a day for yourself because you will be docked. Who can put a dollar value on your own

peace of mind? Only you can decide whether reducing stress is worth a day's pay.

10 CONSIDER OPENING CERTAIN GIFTS EARLY If you have children, opening a single gift the night before Santa comes can reduce your own stress level. Choose a game or a book that you know

will hold your youngster's interest. Giving the child something to do while you finish last-minute preparations can make for a more relaxing Christmas Eve for the whole family. **OCM**

Ronald Palmer is an Orange County writer and regular contributor.

feet and prevent blisters.

Lightweight clothing that can be layered is best for the trail. Choose synthetic fabrics that will wick off sweat and moisture and keep you dry, comfortable and cool. Avoid fabrics like cotton that retain moisture. Make sure you wear a broad-brimmed hat that will protect you from the sun and slough off moisture when it rains. Don't forget a waterproof poncho or jacket. The weather can change dramatically and quickly especially in the mountains.

Be trail safe

Richard Ray, Ed.D and Professor of Kinesiology at Hope College, recommends that you get your three critical body systems – feet, legs and cardiovascular system – in shape before you begin hiking. Take long walks over a variety of terrain. For cardio conditioning, hit the treadmill, cross trainer or bike at the gym. And add weight training for strength and flexibility. As a beginner, start with shorter and easier hikes and work up to moderate and more difficult. In the mountains, don't forget to allow for the high altitude. It takes a while to adjust to the drier and thinner air, so build up gradually. Tackle the most strenuous part of the hike first. The National Park Service recommends following the 2/3 ascent, 1/3 descent rule. In other words, allow for twice as long to hike up as down. Stop for a five to 10-minute break for every half hour to hour spent walking.

The proper provisions are essential even for day hikes. In fact, according to Buck Tilton, director of Curriculum and Development for the Wilderness Medicine Institute of the National Outdoor Leadership School, "the people we end up having to rescue are day hikers who didn't prepare well because they thought they'd only be out for a

few hours." So, regardless of whether it's an all-day hike or you plan to be out for only an hour or two, carry a map of the area, compass, flashlight and matches or a lighter, pocket knife, hand mirror and whistle in your backpack or daypack. Also include a first aid kit, ChapStick, sunscreen and insect repellent. It's easy to get dehydrated – especially on long hikes and at higher altitudes. Take along plenty of water.

You'll work up an appetite so bring food on longer hikes. Peanut butter sandwiches, trail mix, dried fruit, nuts, cheese and crackers, and cookies all make good snacks. If you choose to bring the family dog along, don't forget canine provisions. Discourage your dogs from drinking out of creeks, rivers and lakes by bringing along extra water. Just as with humans, dogs can contract *Guardia*, a virulent intestinal parasite. Many outdoor supply stores sell a nifty portable drinking bowl made of urethane-coated nylon. Bring dog biscuits or dried food in case your pet gets hungry. Make sure your dog is up to date on all vaccines and has been treated for fleas, ticks and heartworms. There are even hiking boots and packs designed especially for dogs!

Never hike alone in the mountains or wilderness. Every year lone hikers fall prey to accidents and even death when on the trail. Even when hiking with a buddy or group, let someone know where you are going and when you'll be back. Study the maps of the area you will be hiking. Check the weather report so you'll know how to dress. But regardless of the report, take clothing for inclement weather. And don't forget to take a cell phone – turned off but available in case of emergencies.

As you hit the trail you'll be building a stronger body as well as a lifetime of memories. **OCM**

ORANGE COUNTY DAY HIKES

You don't have to leave Orange County to find a great place to hike. Here are a few local trails that offer fitness, fun and beautiful scenery.

Holy Jim Falls

This 2.8-mile trail is recommended for beginning to moderately experienced hikers. At the end of the hike is a shallow pool and grotto. A waterfall tumbles from 18 feet above. The trailhead can be accessed via Trabuco Creek Road.

San Juan Loop Trail

This 2.1-mile trail takes about an hour and is ideal for the beginning hiker. Scenery includes beautiful oak woodlands and displays of wildflowers in the spring. The trailhead can be accessed from Ortega Highway.

Oak Trail Loop

This 2.1-mile trail in Caspers Wilderness Park meanders along the west side of Bell Canyon and is a level and easy hike for beginners. It's particularly beautiful in the fall when the oaks that shade the trail turn to autumn colors.

Lower Hot Springs Canyon

Ready for a real challenge? It takes about 10 hours to hike this difficult nine-mile trail that ends at a 140-foot waterfall. This trail is not for beginners. Beware of slippery rocks and snakes. The trailhead is located at the San Juan Trail terminus north of Ortega Highway. **OCM**