# Safe Hiking

1. **Play it smart**. Taking on a three-day hike when you haven't exercised in years it's certainly not the best choice. The same is true of going on a solo hike if you don't have the experience and preparation for it. Even when going on a hike with somebody else, always let people know your destination and when to expect you back. If something happens and you don't turn up, a search party will know where to look for you.

2. **Know exactly where you are going**. It's okay to improvise as you hike, but make sure you have a map or guidebook to help you find your way back. A compass is also a good tool to bring along. Pay attention to natural landmarks around you as you walk past them, so you can recognize them if you need help finding your way. A day before the actual hike, watch the weather report. If heavy showers or other inclement weather is in the forecast, you may need to reschedule your hiking trip.

3. **Bring plenty of water** along (more than you think you will need). If you're hiking for longer than a day, buying a purification system may make more sense so you don't have to carry extra weight in your backpack. Never drink untreated water.

4. **Dress appropriately**. This may not sound like a safety rule, but it will actually keep you safe and healthy if you do it right. Make sure you have rain gear and are dressed in layers, so you can adjust to the surrounding temperatures as they change. Wearing the right hiking shoes will keep your feet from developing blisters and getting injured. Low shoes, for example, can increase your chances for a twisted ankle or lower leg injury.

5. **Don't overexert yourself**. If you need a break, take it. If the hike becomes more than you can handle, turn back. If you feel sick, exhausted, or suspect an injury, take measures to address the issue and return to base if you have to.

6. **Leave local plants and animals alone**. Don't eat berries or leaves you find, even if they look familiar. Making loud noises or wandering away from the marked trails can put you into direct contact with snakes and other dangerous animals, so avoid it when possible. Don't approach or attempt to feed wild animals.

7. **Bring a first-aid kit** along. Learn how to treat basic injuries and how to prevent dehydration and heat stroke or hypothermia.

8. **Leave everything as you found it**. For example, disturbing rocks could cause a rockslide while leaving trash behind may entice wild animals to approach the trail, increasing the dangers for those coming behind you.

9. **Know how to start a fire**. Even if you only plan on staying out for a few hours, it is better to be prepared. If anything happens and you have to spend the night outdoors, a fire will help you stay warm, keep wild animals away, and serve as a beacon for others to find you. Something as simple as waterproof matches should be enough to get a fire started.

10. **Know where to get help**. Most hiking trails have exit points that allow you to take a side path and reach a main road or a wilderness stop. Knowing where those side roads are can make a world of difference if you are seriously injured and alone.