

If you're new to overnight hiking, trying to fit all your gear in your rucksack can be a daunting experience. However, when you break it down, every item will have its place – and hopefully, it will all fit!

It's important for your gear to be packed in the right places to distribute weight evenly. This will both prevent injury and ensure you remain balanced. Not only should you consider weight, but also what you will need to access during the day and the order in which you'll remove items from your pack when you reach camp.

From the back-of-the-pack pots and pans, to the snacks up top and snap-lock bags – read on for tips on how to choose, pack, and reduce weight in a rucksack!

Distributing weight evenly throughout the pack will prevent injury and ensure you remain balanced. Credit: Icebreaker

Choosing Your Pack

The choice of daypack will depend on how often you intend to use it and how much you want to carry. If you are going on an overnight hike, there are more items required and features to bear in mind when choosing a pack. Some considerations are:

A Waist and/or Chest Strap

Over-the-shoulder bags are generally not ideal for your neck and back. It's recommended to have a backpack with two adjustable arm straps and padding on the shoulders. A waist and/or chest strap will help distribute the pack's weight evenly across your back.

Carrying Less Than 1/5 of Your Weight

Daypacks are designed to be lightweight. A normal bag might seem light when you start walking – but after a few hours in the heat, it will feel like a tonne!

Adults should aim to carry up to 20% of their weight, and it's generally recommended for children to carry between 10% and 20% of theirs. When you consider that water will weigh roughly a kilogram per litre, the weight quickly stacks up – so it is important that the pack itself is as light as possible.

Adults should aim to carry up to 20% of their weight. Credit: Deuter

Adequate Space for Essentials

Daypacks come with a range of features, such as emergency whistles, bungee straps for holding water bottles, built-in hydration packs, and small compartments for storing keys and wallets. Consider what you are going to carry as well as how you'll transport your water, and choose your desired features accordingly.

Good Ventilation

Be you walking in the heat or over long distances, a breathable air mesh fabric backing is useful to help with ventilation and reduce sweating.

Compatibility with Your Height and Build

Try before you buy! It's recommended to buy a daypack that suits your height and build. A comfortable pack is a hiker's best friend – and once you find the right pack, you'll likely use it for everything!

For more on hiking, travel, and daypacks – tune into Ben and Lauren's podcast interview with Deuter:

Packing

Waterproofing Your Gear

Before packing, ensure your gear is waterproof. Not all of it, but your sleeping bag, sleeping mat, and clothes should be to the point where you can submerge your pack in a river and they remain dry!

The best way to do this is to use a pack liner. This can be a high-quality, completely waterproof liner such as the Sea to Summit series (available at Snowys), or a heavy-duty garbage bag. Liners do as their name suggests in lining the inside of the pack, so all your gear stays dry. You may like to individually pack some items in Sea to Summit dry bags or compression dry sacks too (also available at Snowys).

First In: Sleeping Bag and Mat

Once waterproofed, start packing your sleeping gear such as your sleeping bag and mat first. Nestle them at the bottom of your pack; if you are using a closed-cell foam mat, you may like to put this on the outside of your pack instead (as it is quite large).



Nestle your sleeping bag and mat at the bottom of your pack. Credit: David Leslie

Fill the Space with Clothing

Stuff all your clothing into the spaces surrounding your sleeping bag and mat. Remember to keep a jumper or warm jacket handy at the top of your pack.

Take a spare change of socks on a day hike too, in case your feet become wet or sweaty. A change of socks can improve your mood dramatically when hiking... as well as prevent blisters!

Cookware

Next, pack in your lightweight cooking gear, placing the heavier items (such as the fuel) closest to your back. This helps to position more weight over your hips. The hips are ideal for carrying heavy gear, with the small of the back most suited to carrying the brunt of the weight. This lowers your centre of gravity and increases your stability (especially when walking on uneven terrain).

A bag with a ridged surface will also help here, preventing sharp instruments from poking at your back.



Take a spare change of socks on a day hike too, in case your feet become wet or sweaty.

Credit: Salomon

Hydration

Similar to the above, place the majority of your water against your back, on top of the cooking gear. The best way to carry water is in a hydro bladder, such as the Camelbak Unbottle 2L or the Black Wolf 2L Bladder/Reservoir. Bottles are OK, but they occupy the same volume of space even when empty. Your typical plastic water bottle is cheap, but doesn't retain its temperature well either – so by the end of the day, you're drinking warm water that tastes of plastic!

Most water bottles these days are BPA-free, and soft flasks such as those from Salomon are a particularly good option; they can be rolled up when emptied, reducing bulk.

It's common to underestimate how much water to carry. Keeping hydrated while hiking requires its own post – but as a general rule it's suggested three litres for a day hike, as a

bare minimum. This will depend on the weather conditions, altitude, your personal health, how much you're carrying, how strenuously you are hiking, and so forth. Either way, carrying too much is better than too little. Water will generally be the heaviest item in your daypack, so consider how you'll carry it.

Soft flasks such as those from Salomon are a particularly good option. Credit: Salomon

Food and Water Placement

Food is best placed around the water and a little further from your back. Again, try to position the heavier items towards your back, and the lighter items around the edge.

If you decide to carry bottles, it is better to split your water up across maybe four, so you can distribute the weight in your pack more evenly. Alternatively, use water bladders to do the same.

Your Tent

This may strike some controversy, but it can be beneficial to pack your hiking tent towards the top of your back, against your shoulders.

The reason for this is that your tent is the first thing to set up upon arriving at camp and the last thing you pack away when leaving (especially if it's raining). It's also an easy item to remove to reach your food and water during a hike. Placing it directly on your shoulders will also ensure you are balanced and carrying the weight through your legs.

Placing your tent directly on your shoulders will ensure you are balanced, carrying the weight through your legs. Credit: Deuter

Last In: Jackets and Jumpers

The last thing to place in the main compartment is a warm jumper. Although you may be warm while hiking, you will cool down very quickly when you stop for a break. If you're working up a sweat, it can be a good idea to remove your shirt and only wear your jumper when you stop, so you don't become too cold!

Close Your Pack Liner

Now that your main compartment is full, close your pack liner!

Although you may be warm while hiking, you will cool down very quickly when you stop for a break. Credit: Deuter

Top Pocket: Rain Coat, First Aid Kit, and Snacks

Just about all packs have a pocket in the top lid of the pack. This is an ideal spot to pack your lightweight rain coat and first aid kit; two very important items that may be needed quickly mid-hike! Carry warm clothing too, in case you're caught out after dark – and ensure your first aid kit is completely waterproof.

Even on a short walk, there is always a small possibility you could break a limb, cut yourself, or be bitten by insects and/or snakes. You need to be prepared for the worst. Most first-aid kits are compact and contain all the essential items.

If you are building a kit from scratch, it's recommended to take:

- Pressure immobilisation bandages
- Regular roller bandages
- Gauze or cotton pads for wounds

- Triangular bandage for breaks
- Band-aids for blisters
- Ointment for insect bites
- Antiseptic cream

Protein rich foods with extended shelf-lives include cereal bars. Credit: Skratch Labs
Oh, and if you have the room – stash some snacks up top too, ideally rich in protein and carbohydrates. Be savvy, too; in hot weather, avoid meat or dairy foods that are likely to spoil. Even for a short walk, carry extra food in case of emergency or delays on your hike. Protein rich foods with extended shelf-lives include cereal bars, or dried fruit and nut mix. For more on hiking food to pack, check out this episode of the Snowys Camping Show:

Small Pockets: Toiletries, Tools and Electronics, Knives, and Accessories

Again, most rucksacks will have pockets either on the side or at the front of the pack. This is where to place all the little items such as toiletries, toilet paper and trowel, a head torch, a multi-tool (pocket knife), a wallet, keys, and a phone.

On a day hike, a torch is still important in case you are delayed or misjudge the length of the journey back to camp. In remote locations or where tracks aren't well marked, you may also want to take navigation tools such as a map, compass, or GPS.

On a day hike, a torch is still important in case you are delayed. Credit: Nebo
Emergency blankets, PLBs, and multi-tools are also useful for safety purposes. If an accident does occur, especially something as serious as a snakebite, you need some form of communication too. Mobile reception can be unpredictable in the bush, especially walking through rocky valleys or in remote locations. Check your phone every so often, and take note of where the last place was where you had reception. In an emergency, someone in your crew can head back to that point and call for help. If you don't have any other pockets, squeeze these items into your top lid pocket or the main compartment.

Check your phone every so often, and take note of where the last place was where you had reception. Credit: Zoleo

If you are hiking for a day, you're likely to sweat away some of your sunscreen – so take some along with you to reapply. Sometimes too, a hike can take longer than you anticipate, which can mean getting caught out during dusk with the mozzies! Keep some insect repellent on hand for these moments.

The weather can also be unpredictable; it might be overcast when you begin your hike, but become sunny later on. Keep your sunnies in your day pack just in case.

The weather can be unpredictable; it might be overcast when you begin your hike, but become sunny later on. Credit: Salomon

Reducing Pack Weight

Ditch or Recycle Packaging

Just because your sleeping mat and sleeping bag both came with a stuff sack, does not mean

you have to use both of them. For example, use one large stuff sack for your sleeping bag and clothes, or sleeping mat and clothes.

Remove all unnecessary packaging from food and consolidate into Ziplock bags. You'll only need to carry rubbish back out anyway.

Two Uses for Everything

Wherever possible, allocate everything in your pack more than one purpose. For example:

- Sleep in your sleeping bag, but also use it as your ultimate source of warmth if the temperature drops dramatically.
- Use a lightweight pocket knife to eradicate the need for a separate food knife
- Use a spork to eat meals (a lightweight fork-spoon and butter knife, in one!)
- Use a stainless steel bowl and cup to both cook and eat from
- Use Ziplock bags for both organising your food before you go, then using as small rubbish or waterproof bags once empty

Look over other items you've packed that may achieve the same result or serve the same purpose as another. Credit: David Leslie

Not Sure? Not Needed

If you keep coming back to the same item, wondering if you should take it with you – chances are, you could probably do without it.

Look over other items you've packed that may achieve the same result or serve the same purpose i.e. could you also use your woollen beanie as a pot holder? Think about the likelihood of actually using that product on your hike, and if your walk can carry on without it.

Consider Every Purchase Carefully

When buying your gear, place as much importance on weight as you do features. Often, all the extra features are something you talk about but never use, and ultimately add to pack weight. Over the years, attempt to buy lighter and more efficient products each time you replace/upgrade a gadget or piece of gear.

Place as much importance on weight as you do on features. Credit: Ben Collaton

It All Adds Up

Keep a spreadsheet of all items of gear, plus their respective weights. Use this before you start packing to estimate pack weight. Some may say this is a little overboard, but it works for some. Every gram saved on each item you pack adds up quicker than you may realise. If you're a big eater, the less gear you have, the more food and water you can take instead.

If you take the time to pack your rucksack correctly, your body will thank you for it. Credit: Salomon

It may take you a few attempts to get it right – but for your first time, pack and re-pack your rucksack a few times, and test to ensure you have the correct balance of weight. You don't want your pack to be lopsided or pulling you backwards, nor any sharp bits poking you through the harness!

A neat pack is usually a well-packed pack – so keep everything tidy, don't hang anything on the outside, (unless it's your roll mat or hiking poles), and ensure your pack is fitted correctly. There are so many other levels and considerations for those attempting to get their pack



weight down below 10kg too – you can search 'ultra-lightweight' on [Bushwalk Australia](#) for an abundance of forum discussions on this topic.

With experience, you'll find the perfect place for every item you take. Until then, the instructions above will provide a good idea of what to pack where, and how to distribute the weight. If you take the time to pack your rucksack correctly, your body will thank you for it and you'll have a much more enjoyable time!

Drop into Snowys, or give us a call for expert advice on how to find the perfect rucksack for your frame, the best gear for your trip, and more information on how to pack a rucksack as a beginner.

How do you pack for a day or overnight hike? Let us know in the comments below!

This post was updated for 2023, and features input from multiple authors.