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Hit the Trails with Trail Mix -- Play Hard, Eat Smart

Sheila Gains, Family and Consumer Science Agent, Arapahoe County

Late summer and early fall can be great times to hike trails in your area. Early mornings might be the best time to venture out if the weather is still hot or rainy in the afternoons. Hiking doesn't always mean walking in the mountains, forests or wilderness. City and neighborhood hiking can be just as fun. The fun part of the hike is often the sights you see while exploring the outdoors. If the term hiking sounds like too much work, call it an "outside adventure" or a "walk-about".

Plan for safety, comfort and fun:

- Bring sun glasses, sun screen, hand sanitizer, water and snacks for everyone.
- Kids can wear a pack and carry most of their own personal items.

If hiking in a rural or wilderness area, also bring:

- Cell phone, fully charged
- Map and compass, or at least one hiker who is very familiar with the area.
- Windbreaker/rain jacket, hat and whistle for each hiker. Children can carry or wear their own.
- Tell someone where you are going and when you plan to be back.
- Nice to haves include: Bandages (for small blisters or scrapes), tissues or toilet paper, long pants, dry socks, small blanket or tarp to sit on, magnifying glass and a plant or insect identification guide.



Let's Talk

The age and enthusiasm level of children should help determine the length and difficulty of the hike. Praise kids for their hiking and observation skills. Make it interesting by playing games along the way like "I Spy", or challenge kids to find a yellow flower, square rock, etc. If kids aren't excited about going, let them invite a friend, adults can be boring!

Remind kids to always stay on the trail and never be out of your sight. If they can't see you, you can't see them. Instruct them that if they can't see you, they must sit down on the trail and wait for you to catch up. If they don't see you by the time they have sung their favorite song 5 times, they should start blowing their whistle.

Pace the group so that you stop at least every 20 minutes to sit, drink water, eat snack and enjoy the sites. Kids get tired and cranky if they go more than a few hours without eating or drinking.

Recipe for Health:

You Decide Custom Trail Mix

Trail mix is easy to make (kids can help), easy to store and easy to grab before heading out to run an errand, go for a hike or rushing to a soccer game. It requires no refrigeration and can be packed in small re-closable plastic bags. It can be carried in a back pack or purse until used within 3-4 weeks, or stored in a cool place in the house for up to 6 months.

Ingredients:

You get to decide! A mix of sweet and salty, soft and crunchy is always popular.

Suggestions:

- Cereal, ready to eat, whole grain (rice squares, corn squares, wheat squares, or oat o's)
- Small crackers or pretzels (oyster, fish, or animal crackers)
- Fruit, dried and chopped in to bite sized pieces (raisins, cran-raisins, apples, apricots, mango, papaya, dates, prunes, or pineapple).
- Nuts or seeds (peanuts, walnuts, almonds, pecans, soy nuts, sunflower seeds, or pumpkin seeds)
- Candy coated chocolate pieces.



Instructions:

Wash hands. Pour ingredients into a large bowl; gently mix with hands or long handled spoon. Fill small re-closable plastic bags, and seal shut. For best flavor store in a cool place (refrigeration is not needed) and use within 6 months.

I found 100% shredded whole wheat squares and generic toasted oat O's where the best cereal bargains. Raisins were the best dried fruit bargain. Candy coated chocolate pieces were cheaper than chocolate chips per ounce and did not melt in my hand or when left in the car for a few hours. My last batch of trail mix included 3 cups whole wheat cereal squares, 3 cups honey-nut oat O's cereal, 1 cup cinnamon toast cereal, 1 cup peanuts, 1 cup almonds, 1 cup raisins, 1 small package peanut butter filled pretzel bites and 1 small bag (6 oz.) candy coated dark chocolate pieces. My mix cost approx. \$.50 per ½ cup per serving.