



September 2021 Newsletter

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Hiking Promotes a Healthy Mind, Body and Family *By Nicole Clark, Family & Consumer Science Agent, La Plata County*

A slight chill in the air, long shadows and a brilliant display of gold, orange and red - these are the hallmark signs of fall. It is also your last call to hike before it snows!

Your adventure may take you to a trail either near or far from home. It doesn't matter where you go, so long as you go. There are many good reasons for taking the family on a hike. Physical activity and being outdoors can help clear your mind and keep your body fit. It is also a great way to strengthen family relationships and build resilience. Resilience is the ability to respond positively to tough situations. It's a life skill worth developing!



After loading your packs with hiking essentials such as rain gear, warm clothes, food, water and a first aid kit, there's one more thing you need to do. **Help your kids to set an achievable goal.** It can be a distance or desirable end point. Examples include, hike your age in miles or reach a lake. A goal helps your child mentally prepare for the journey. As a parent, you can mentally prepare by expecting your kids to complain at some point. Follow the tips below to help get past the whining and back to the fun of hiking. **Bonus tip:** When all else fails, it never hurts to carry a special treat to help bring magic back into the hike.

HIKING FOR PHYSICAL HEALTH:

- Limit the weight of a child's day pack to 10 - 20% of their body weight. For a young child this might include a water bottle, a snack, and a rain jacket.
- Start the adventure by looking for a good hiking stick. A stick helps reduce leg muscle fatigue by engaging other muscles, such as arms and back. Hiking poles work too, but if kids decide against using them, you can't toss them into the woods like you can a stick.
- Pace yourself. Slow and steady will help you reach your goal.
- Take several 10- 20-minute sitting breaks, as needed for recovery.
- Eat foods with carbohydrates and protein, such as a peanut butter sandwich or dried fruit and nuts, to sustain physical energy.
- Drink water at least every 30 minutes. If it's hot outside, consider adding an electrolyte powder to your water. Regardless of your goal, turn around when your water is half empty.

HIKING FOR MENTAL HEALTH:

- Stop and smell the flowers or notice small details of nature.
- Stop and take a few deep breaths.
- Say one thing you are grateful for on the hike.

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HIKING FOR FAMILY BONDING:

- Share words of encouragement.
- Sing a song together.
- Walk hand in hand when the trail allows.
- At the end, take turns sharing your favorite thing about the hike and what you'd like to see on the next hike.



HIKING TO BUILD RESILIENCE:

- Practice saying the following words out loud, "I can do this". You don't have to believe it, just keep saying it.
- When you're tired and ready to quit, stop and look back. Notice how far you've made it!
- Remember your goal or destination. Are you sure you want to quit now? What do you need to keep going?

Let's Talk

To reinforce that hiking is good for the mind and body, ask your young hikers questions to raise awareness and curiosity. What part of your body is getting stronger when you hike? On a scale of 1 – 10, how much energy do you have right now? Low numbers may indicate it's time for a snack or break.

Instruct your kids to be on the lookout for beautiful spots to stop, look and listen. Acknowledge hard sections of the hike, then ask your children to reflect on their accomplishments thus far. Model the behavior you want to see. For example, your enthusiastic voice and curiosity for what may be around the next corner will be contagious.

START HIKING

Begin with a short hike to avoid a negative first experience. A reasonable distance may be 1 – 2 miles, or less. Look to local parks, nature preserves, state parks, BLM land, and national forests in your area to get ideas on where to go. Your local library or bookstore may carry hiking guides to rent or buy.

Do you have a child starting fourth grade? Be sure to sign up for a one-year pass your family can use to explore any national park for free. It's easy to do, sign up at the National Park Foundation's Every Kid Outdoors website (<https://www.nationalparks.org/our-work/campaigns-initiatives/every-kid-outdoors>).

Recipe for Health Trail Mix

With clean hands, toss together equal parts:

- Whole grain cereal such as shredded wheat or Cheerios/O's
- Dried fruit such as raisins, dried cranberries, cherries, or apricots
- Small candy coated chocolates such as M&Ms
- Roasted nuts
- Salty snacks such as small pretzels or crackers



Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods...