



Packing your kit

Heading out on a day hike in the hills with us? Here are some useful tips on what to wear, what to carry and how to pack your rucksack

What to wear

All seasoned walkers will tell you that having the correct clothing can be the difference between a happy hike and a sorrowful slog. But this doesn't mean simply buying lots of 'technical' outdoor kit. The key to comfort is the principle of layering. Basically, this means adding or removing layers of clothing in response to changes in weather conditions, as well as your own body temperature.

Baselayer

This next-to-skin layer wicks away sweat to help keep you warm when it's cold, cool when it's hot, and as dry as possible at all times. Long-sleeve or short-sleeve is down to personal preference, as is synthetic or merino wool. The latter is warmer and tends to smell less, though synthetic layers are improving in performance all the time. Synthetic layers also tend to slide more easily under other layers, which can aid comfort and make it easier to remove or add clothing. Layers with a higher collar can help to protect the back of the neck from sun or windchill, and a zip can also aid cooling. Thumb loops are useful in eliminating gaps between sleeves and gloves.

Midlayer

The traditional midlayer is a polyester fleece, which is light, warm, soft and quick-drying. Other midlayers include 'hard face' fleeces and softshell jackets (which have a durable, windproof outer), hybrid garments (to warm your core and wick sweat in areas like the underarms) and 'active insulation' midlayers (loosely-woven insulation that offers lightweight warmth but excellent breathability).

Insulated jacket

In cold conditions, you can wear an insulated down or synthetic jacket instead of or in addition to a midlayer. This can be a useful spare layer to carry in your pack too, to put on during rest stops.

Waterproof layer

In Britain, it's always advisable to carry a hooded, waterproof jacket, sometimes called a 'hard shell'. This provides windproof weather protection.

Walking trousers

Lightweight yet rugged trousers, made from a quick-drying fabric.

Overtrousers

Waterproof trousers, ideally with at least a quarter-length leg zip to easily fit over walking boots if the heavens open.

Walking socks

Wear cushioned, wicking walking socks. These come in various different weights (thicknesses) for different conditions and seasons. Many walkers opt to wear a pair of thin liner socks and a thicker outer pair.

Boots or trail shoes

If you walk mainly on good-quality paths, trail shoes can be a good lightweight option, but on rougher ground, wear comfortable and supportive boots. In winter, you'll need stiffer boots, especially if using them with crampons.

Dry bag

Use a rucksack liner or dry bags to keep your kit dry. You can buy roll-top dry bags in many different sizes from any good outdoor shop. For those on a budget, rubble sacks are a good substitute. These are basically heavy-duty polythene bags, and can be purchased from most DIY stores. You may have a rucksack with a waterproof covering already attached.

Head torch

A head torch is more practical than a hand-held torch, and is useful if a walk finishes in the dark. It can also be a useful flashing signal in emergencies. Always carry spare batteries.

Water bottle or hydration bladder

Take a water bottle of at least 1 litre in capacity, or a hydration bladder. These have integrated drinking tubes that work with most modern rucksack designs, and make it easier to stay hydrated during active walks.

Food

Take a mix of slow-release carbs for day-long energy, and fast-release food for a quick energy boost. Pack a little more food than you need in case of emergency. Don't underestimate the restorative power of Haribo or Jelly Babies!

Spare socks

Nothing ruins a walk like wet feet, and changing your socks can also help to prevent blisters.

Hat and gloves

A warm woolly hat or beanie, just in case temperature drops (which it will as you gain altitude). A thin pair of gloves will suffice in summer, but for the colder months pack a warmer, waterproof pair.

Neck gaiter

The walker's alternative to a scarf, a neck gaiter (often called a 'Buff', which is the best-known brand) offers protection from cold, wind and sun and can be worn in multiple ways.

Flask

A double-walled metal vacuum flask is the best way to keep tea, coffee or hot chocolate warm on a long walk, while being robust enough to carry in your pack.

Packing your kit

If you've ever found that the thing you need always seems to be buried at the bottom of your pack, the following principles should prove useful. Of course, all walkers have their own preferences, so feel free to develop your own packing system – but try not to just stuff everything in! A badly-packed rucksack is uncomfortable to carry, and can even cause shoulder and neck injuries, as well as leading to back pain and bad posture. The old saying, 'A place for everything and everything in its place', is a useful adage. Think about when, how often and how quickly you're likely to need a particular item before it goes in your pack. **DON'T FORGET TO PUT ANY MEDICATION YOU WILL NEED AT THE TOP OF YOUR BAG.**

Happy Hiking!