



So, you've accomplished a few day hikes and now you're keen to take it to the next level: an overnighter!

How do you prepare? What do you need to consider to not only keep yourself safe but have an enjoyable time?

From what to pack to how to pack, this blog *unpacks* the best ways to prepare for an overnight hike.



With a little preparation, your first overnight hike will be a great experience. Image: MSR

Keep it Simple

Your first overnight hiking experience should be exactly as described: an 'overnight' hike. This means heading off for just one night away – *maybe* two, if you feel up for the challenge. Keeping your first experience short and simple will allow the opportunity to become familiar with the trail lifestyle without committing to an extended expedition. There is a lot to learn and get used to when hiking overnight, which will shock your body!

Walking while carrying a load is much more physically demanding. For an overnight hike, not only do you need to get used to the extended physical exertion but doing so while carrying your pack! Then, there's adjusting to a lightweight mat and your other gear: tent, sleeping bag, head torch, hiking stove, poles... not to mention becoming accustomed to hiking foods. Your supplies need to be lightweight and preferably packed with nutrition and ingredients that provide slow-release energy. Quality dehydrated meals, or even dehydrating your own, are a much better choice than 2-minute noodles.

Dr. Kate Grarock chats with Ben and Lauren on the Snowys Camping Show about how she prepares her food for hiking adventures:



Take it easy and don't try to tackle too many km's on your first overnight hike. Image: Salomon

Don't Walk Too Far!

Trailblazing with a loaded pack is very different to a day hike. Even those who consider themselves to be quite fit may find walking with a larger pack more difficult than previous experiences. Carrying a load forces your muscles to be used in different ways to accommodate the extra weight.

It's essential to give consideration to your footwear and socks, and worth taking a moment during your preparation to ensure you have suitable shoes that correctly fit your foot. Your feet are your most important asset when hiking, so being ill-equipped may ruin the trip.

Most walks for beginners are between 5 – 10km's per day, beginning at morning teatime and ending at lunchtime the next day. Use this timeframe and distance as a guide for your own planning and preparation.

Don't try to tackle too many kilometres on your first experience. You should be able to walk at a relaxed pace, take plenty of breaks, and enjoy yourself. Stop to appreciate the native wildlife and birds, but aim to stroll into camp with at least an hour of daylight left.



Pick a hike that's close to home and stay trail smart. Image: Chris Newman



Gear

It's very important to get the basics right for your first experience. Further, it's equally important to realise that you will learn something new every time you head away. This is all part of the challenge and enjoyment of living out of a rucksack!

A Quality Backpack

The Deuter packs makes carrying heavy loads far more comfortable than the other 'budget' backpacks on the market.

You may have heard the saying, 'equipment can be high-quality, light, or cheap – pick two'. This certainly rings true for most outdoor equipment and becomes even more significant when it comes to hiking gear. You often need to choose between hiking light and expensive, or saving money and doing a little more training to carry a 25kg pack of bulky essentials! Taking the hood off the pack saves a little bit of weight – and if you don't need it, why not? Everything that went in the hood can go into the side pockets, but keep in mind that not all packs have these.

If you have a decent, well-fitted backpack, it matters less if the rest of your 'budget' gear is bulky or heavy. It can still be carried in relative comfort, which makes all the difference.

A Quality Tent

Pack a tent large enough for your gear and bedding. Try to keep it under 2.5kg, or share the load with a friend. The [Companion Pro Hiker 2](#) is a fantastic entry level tent, more than adequate for Australian conditions. Or, check out the [ultralight tent range from Sea to Summit](#).

Groundsheet

Just a simple tarp will do the trick to protect your tent, keep it clean, and waterproof the floor.



Pack a tent large enough for your gear and bedding. Image: Chris Newman

Lightweight and Compact Sleeping Bag

There are two choices for hiking bags: synthetic or down. Synthetic tends to be cheaper and easier to care for, but a bit bulky. Down can be half the weight and half the size but twice as expensive. If you can get a sleeping bag around the 1kg to 1.5kg mark, you will be on the money – but try not take a giant bag that takes up half your rucksack!

A Well-Insulated Sleeping Mat

There are a wide range of sleeping mats on the market from closed cell foam mats to down-filled, high-quality snow mats. You can choose how much you want to spend but the main thing to look for is something that will insulate you from the ground. The comfort level will depend on how much you want to spend and how much weight you want to carry. Something like the [Sea to Summit Ultralight Insulated](#) is a good place to start.

Keep an eye out for the highest-rated [R-value](#) (a measurement denoting insulative performance) for mats in your price range. For more details on choosing a sleeping mat for hiking, read this guide [here](#).



It's hardcore to sleep on a pile of clothes, but you may soon realise how much better off you are with a little more support! Image: Sea to Summit

Pillow or No Pillow?

It's hardcore to sleep on a pile of clothes, but you may soon realise how much better off you



are with a little more support! The [Sea to Summit Aeros Premium Pillow](#) is hard to overlook on those off-grid getaways, even for an ultralight gram-counter!

Simple, Cheap, and Lightweight Cooking Gear

You'll need a stove to cook your dinner. The [Trangia 27-1](#) is a fantastic lightweight yet compact outdoor stove that is perfect for cooking for one to two people. There are plenty of budget options available these days, including gas, spirit, and solid fuel burning [stoves](#). Another option for simple overnight hikes is to boil water before leaving and carry it in a vacuum [thermos](#) flask. This is roughly the same weight as a stove, but saves you the hassle of boiling water once you reach camp.

A fork and spoon are needed, and a cup is a good idea, but have a think about whether you need a plate and bowl – you can often eat out of the pot you cooked in, to save space and weight. The Sea to Summit long-handled spork is handy, as everything you need is right there as one utensil.

Don't forget about cleanup too! A scouring pad and a little dishwashing liquid is all you need, or even keeping a cut up piece of sponge in the pot. Let your dishes air dry to negate the need to bring a tea towel.



The Trangia is a fantastic lightweight yet compact outdoor stove. Image: Chris Newman

Nutritional Foods

When planning your meals, you will need lightweight food with good nutritional value. Two-minute noodles are lightweight... but if we're talking nutritional value, you may as well eat the packaging! That said, it's recommended to carry some emergency noodles. There may not be the intention of eating them, but they're good to have for peace of mind.

There is a great range of tasty [freeze dried meals](#) on the market such as Radix Nutrition, which definitely fit the description of easy, lightweight, and nutritional. Don't forgo all delicacies – follow an instant pasta course with a luxury instant dessert, like an [apricot crumble](#) from [Back Country Cuisine](#). An easy, no-mess breakfast can be had by preparing ham and cheese croissants and wrapping them in foil.

Muesli, nut, and chocolate bars are good snacks to take. Have a good look at what packaging you need, and what can be left behind. For example, you don't need to take the box the muesli bars came in.

Snack Options:

- Dried fruit
- Nuts
- Protein bars
- Lollies
- Beef jerky
- Dark chocolate
- [Clif bars](#)



There is a great range of tasty freeze dried meals on the market, like Radix Nutrition. Image: Radix Nutrition

For more on snacks for the track, check out [this blog](#) – or for meal ideas, [this blog](#).



You'll use a lot of energy when hiking, so snacks are very important. Take a 'continuously grazing' approach, rather than sticking to just three big meals per day.

Know Where the Water is

Plan your trip in advance to work out where water is available and how much is there. Water will be the heaviest item in your pack, but also the most valuable – so it's very important to take enough for what you need (meals and cleanup included), but not too much more.

Two to three litres per person, per day (depending on the weather), is a good rule. This may sound like a lot for a two to three-day hike, but you will be working a lot harder hiking than normal.

For your first time, try to plan hikes that lead to water at each campsite. That way, you can minimise your weight and get to know how much water you require when hiking. Make yourself aware of what's required to make your drinking water safe too, to avoid any nasty stomach bugs. Check out the range of water filtration and treatment gear.



Prioritise warmth and nutrition on overnight hikes. Image: MSR


Keep Clothing to a Minimum

Try to choose items that are breathable and quick-drying. Avoid cotton as it becomes wet and cold quickly – and, as always, the lighter the better! As a general rule, you should take one set of clothes for walking in and one warm and dry set to change into at night. Hiking in pants or shorts depends on personal preference – but it might be worth having a pair of showerproof pants to keep wind and rain out in blustery conditions. The longer you head away, the more clothes you may want to take. Just keep in mind that but you'll need to bear the weight.

A set of thermals is a must too! Pack a warm jacket as well as a raincoat, hat, beanie, and a good set of boots and socks. Instead of a standard bath towel, a couple of cotton tea-towels are light and handy. Use one as a towel after swimming, and the other as a scarf, sunshade, or for drying tents.

A Good Raincoat

Rain, wind, and cold makes for a shivering, average trip at best, or hypothermia at worst! Weather conditions can change very quickly, especially on high-altitude land and in the mountains, such as the Victorian Alps. A good raincoat will cause rain to bead and run-off the outer shell while allowing sweat and perspiration to exit. This prevents getting soaked from the inside while traversing all that hilly terrain!

Staying dry when hiking overnight is particularly important, as it can be difficult in rainy conditions to properly dry off before hopping into a tent and sleeping bag. A raincoat also provides an outer barrier in windy conditions, allowing insulative layers underneath the chance to trap air and create warmth around your body. 

As a general rule, take one set of clothes for walking in and one warm and dry set to change into at night. Image: Radix Nutrition

Comfortable Footwear

Everyone has a horror story about enormous blisters or squashed feet that time they went hiking in twenty-year-old boots handed down by their grandmother. Considering that your feet are with you every step of the way, it's important to have boots that will keep you comfortable and dry.

Your boots should be what you spend a decent amount of money on – and be sure you wear



them in well before your trip, to identify any pressure spots that might require extra padding using hikers' wool or blister protection.

Ankle support, grippy tread patterns, or waterproofing might be needed depending on the conditions and climate expected. You don't necessarily need high-cut boots meant for rocky mountain expeditions – just ensure your shoes have been fitted properly, remembering that feet expand slightly when a load is carried.

First Aid

Ensure your first aid kit has everything you need, while keeping the weight down. Think about what you are likely to encounter in the area you are going to. Some of the more common injuries to prepare for are snake or spider bites, rolled ankles, cuts, broken bones, and dehydration.



Your feet are with you every step of the way, so look after them. Image: Black Wolf

The Little Things

- Toiletries, such as a toothbrush and toothpaste (only enough for a couple nights)
- Toilet paper and a trowel (again, only take what you need)
- Head torch with fresh batteries
- Pocket knife (also used for cooking, hence you only need a fork and spoon)
- Matches / lighter / flint (for lighting your stove and a fire)
- Phone / wallet / keys

The Handy Things

- Thermal sleeping bag liner, for extra insulation.
- Scrub gloves (thin gardening gloves), for when you need to hold onto weeds or branches on steep terrain.
- Fingerless gloves, for the cold nights at camp.
- Day pack, for heading into town for a resupply or doing a short hike with your camp still set up.



Remember a head torch, with fresh batteries! Image: Black Diamond

'If it doesn't keep you alive, it's a luxury'

Once you have your kit together, pack it all in your rucksack and weigh it. You should not be carrying more than one-third of your body weight. If you're not happy with the weight of your pack, then pull everything back out again and take a good look at what you are taking.

For more on what you don't need on a hiking trip, tune into this episode of the Snowys Camping Show with Ben and Lauren:

Example Pack

Everything considered, your packing list may look like this:

- 3L water bladder
- 2P Tent
- Sleeping bag



How to Prepare for an Overnight Hike

- Sleeping mat
- Cooking water
- Long-handled spork
- Water bottle or pouch
- Rain cover (for your pack)
- Towel
- Toilet paper
- Fleece
- Rain Jacket
- Hiking/trekking poles
- Campsite shoes
- Map and compass
- Groundsheet
- First aid kit
- PLB
- Notepad and pen
- Head torch
- Waterproof matches
- Mini roll of duct tape
- Garbage snap-lock bag
- Spare batteries
- Pocket knife
- Earbuds
- Lip balm
- 2 in 1 sunscreen and insect repellent
- Anti-chaffing balm
- Toiletries



An example pack. Image: Kelly-Anne Burgess

When you come back from your first trip, have a good look at what you used and what you didn't. You'll know you've got it right when you come back with an emergency meal, half a litre of water, and every item in your pack used!



Start Locally

Keep your first hike close to home, and don't attempt to stray from the track. It's wise to stay close to your town or city with easily navigated and clearly marked trails. Save the remote trips for when you have gained knowledge and confidence – otherwise, you can find yourself in a dangerous situation.

Choose a trail that is interesting, picturesque, and allows you to build experience while still ensuring your safety. Look for one with a designated campsite and easy road access. This gives you the option to call for assistance if you need it, especially as you get used to this 'overnight hiking' thing.

Walk With a Friend

Your first overnight hike should *not* be alone. Go with a friend, preferably with experience, who can offer advice and encouragement if needed.

Hiking alone can be a fantastic experience in self-reliance and independence, but it's much safer for beginners to adventure with a friend or a group. If you decide to travel alone, it's recommended that you arrange to meet your friends or family at the campsite, or at least ensure you're walking in an area with full phone reception and sufficient vehicle access. Take the precautions of notifying any rangers in the area and leaving your itinerary with close family or friends.



Your first overnight hike should not be alone. Image: BlackWolf

Stay Hydrated

Your hydration needs will vary depending on your body, the weather, and the environment. Don't underestimate how much water you will need, and consider your electrolytes too. Consuming too much water can dilute the sodium levels in your body and lead to Hyponatremia. Learning how to manage your hydration needs and balance your fluid intake with powder or gel supplements is knowledge gained through experience.

A good rule to follow is 3 litres per person, per day. Remember to allow extra water for cooking and cleaning your cookware too. Of course, this can add to your pack weight quickly – so try to pick an area where you can fill up with water along the way, or at least at your campsite.

If neither of those options are available, you may need to organise a 'water drop' to minimise the volume you need to carry. This is where a friend or family member meets you at a pre-determined point to deliver a water refill.

Choose Your Season Carefully

The weather can be quite unpredictable, but try your best to plan your adventure for when the weather forecast is fair. Check the BOM website as part of your preparation and consider downloading their app to stay updated.

Temperatures hovering in the low to mid-20s with fine conditions are ideal. Planning your first



walk when it's freezing cold and wet, or in the scorching heat, is unlikely to support the amazing experience you were hoping for. It's also suggested to be wary of the warmer weather during late spring; at this time, snakes are emerging from their winter hibernation and can be more aggressive.

Remember to wear sunscreen and a hat when walking, even if it's a cool and overcast day. Keep the fluids up with regular, small sips, rather than guzzling a whole bottle in one go!



Don't underestimate how much water you'll need, and consider electrolytes too. Image: Salomon

Think of Safety!

Assuming you've chosen a local trail with well-defined tracks and a clearly marked route, you will still need to take a map and compass to ensure you are heading in the right direction. For this reason, some basic map reading skills will be necessary. Alternatively, this is another benefit of walking with an experienced friend or group.

There are helpful mapping apps like Strava or Avenza that are GPS-enabled and allow you to both plot your route ahead of time and navigate as you go. Strava includes access to an online community and performance tracking features, but the extent of your usage can be tailored in your privacy settings.

Ensure you have a way to communicate, be that to check in with mates and loved ones or to keep an emergency device for peace of mind. For your first trip, try to pick an area that has good phone reception. If this is not possible, you may need to consider an alternative.

Devices like Satellite Phones, UHF handheld radios, PLBs, and Satellite Messengers provide extended coverage when mobile phone service is inadequate. PLBs are fantastic in emergency situations when you need to be rescued. Satellite Messengers allow the flexibility of being able to send an SOS alert, but also a text message to someone to notify them that you're okay.

If you intend to hike regularly, it may be worth purchasing your own. Some are also available for hire from most good communications stores, or even some ranger stations.



Hiking provides us with the opportunity to reconnect with nature, and each other. Image: BlackWolf

Record Your Experience

One of the main reasons for hiking in the first place is the thrill of venturing out into the wild. It provides us with an opportunity to reconnect with nature and appreciate some amazing scenery, as well as improve our fitness and mental health. So, take a camera or just your phone, and capture those beautiful moments to share with your friends and family when you get home.

A photo may speak a thousand words – but don't let that discount the value of journaling too. Remember to take a notepad and pen or, if you have an artistic flair, a small sketchbook and a few pencils!

As well as recording your inspiration and thoughts, you can also make notes on what you



wish to improve upon in future trips. Details about your walk, location, or gear are all useful – or you might cross paths with another hiker who has tips to share too.

Practice Minimal Impact Hiking

Quite simply, this embraces the concept of ‘take only pictures and leave only footprints’. This means leaving no trace of being there, and taking out *everything* that you took in. Leave no rubbish or food scraps behind.

No, the animals will not enjoy your scraps, nor will the scraps simply rot away. In fact, some native animals can develop diseases from eating food that is not typical of their intended diet. This also extends to toileting. Some areas even require you to carry out your ‘droppings’... so when planning your first overnight hike, it can be a good idea to stick to an area that has toilets at the campground.

If nature calls along the trail, ensure you go at least 100m from any stream or waterway. Everything should be buried completely. Ben and Lauren discuss taking care of business off the grid in [Episode 51](#) of the [Snowys Camping Show](#).



Sleeping out overnight can add something special to your hiking experience. Image: MSR

Time to Explore!

Lightweight overnight hiking is a fantastic experience, taking you to some of the most untouched and picturesque places in the world. If you are new to it, remember to take it slowly and gently. Ease your way into it so your body and mind have time to adjust to the physical and mental challenges.

These tips will help promise a safe and enjoyable experience. There is a lot to learn, but once you get started you can aim to explore more challenging and remote areas.



Overnight hiking takes you to some of the most untouched and picturesque places in the world. Image: Chris Newman

So, are you ready to head on out there?