



Hiking in the outdoors is great exercise for the mind and body. *Solvitur ambulando* is how it goes in latin. Translation: *It is solved by walking*.

That's a little enigmatic... so let's start with 10 concise ways in which hiking beats any gym workout. Then, we'll take a step back to discuss how being fit *for* hiking is important too, and the recommended ways in which to train for a multi-day hike.



We'll take a step back to discuss how being fit for hiking is important too. Image: Coleman Australia

### **1. Vitamin D**

You get a lot of on the hike track! This little guy plays a direct role in over 2000 functions within the body. Pretty good to have around!

### **2. Long Aerobic Exercise**

Low-level exercise gets the blood flowing, which in turn provides oxygen and nutrients to your cells. This aids in their repair and helps them to grow stronger. Plus, for those 'calendar' types, muscles working at a consistent but low-level pace burn fat.

### **3. Fresh Air**

Whether or not you believe the "negative ions" theory of fresh air (the negative ones are the good ones) there's no doubt that it's way better to be breathing fresh air than recycled gym air.

### **4. Good Company**

And plenty of it! So much that you may even grow tired of it by the end of the hike. Another good thing about hiking though is that you can travel solo if you need a little time to yourself.

### **5. Mental Exercise**

Forget running mindlessly – hiking often involves triangulating your position, calculating hours to the next campsite based on average pace, following a bearing through a forest,



estimating required water and food, predicting the weather, and – if you're game – even calculating the time using the sun!



*Hiking brings with it good company.*

### **6. Functional Exercise**

When you hike, you train your body to work as it is designed. This involves lots of muscles all working in synergy, adapting to the situation as required. Gyms often lack this by exercising muscles in only one motion (take the classic bicep curl, for example). Hiking also helps to teach your mind to control your body more effectively by providing various challenges – think rocks, tree stumps, tussock grass, and steep uphill/downhill paths.

### **7. Low Impact**

If you allow your body ease into it, hiking is a safe exercise for your joints. In fact, as hinted in point 2 above, it can actually be good for your joints in the right circumstances. Hiking or trekking poles are recommended for this reason too – read about all the reasons why in [this blog](#).

### **8. Circadian Rhythm Alignment**

Organising your day around the sun has many benefits to the body, including lowered stress levels and better sleep. This is due to the influence of light – especially blue – on your suprachiasmatic nucleus (body clock) and pineal gland.

### **9. Mental Detox**

Life becomes simple. No emails, phone calls, texts, tweets, or social media notifications. Remember, your phone is for an emergency – not for checking emails on that peak where you only score two bars of reception!

### **10. It's Fun!**

For some people, gyms simply aren't – so why pay for another membership? Speak to the



staff at Snowys about becoming well-equipped for hiking instead.

## Hold Up - The Gym Still Plays a Part!

'Why do I need to get fit to walk?'

'Isn't walking enough?'

'Why should I need to get fit for something that is essentially supposed to be my time of fun?'

'Do I really need to think about how fit I am to enjoy the outdoors?'

These are all perfectly good questions. Consider this, though: have you ever walked with a stone in your shoe? Was it really possible to enjoy the company, the wildlife, the spectacular views, and the clean fresh air, when all you could think about was getting that damn stone out of your shoe? Not likely.

Everything is more enjoyable when you're comfortable. By the same token, you'll be more comfortable if you're able to do the things you love with ease: walking, hiking, climbing, camping, or whatever you do for fun. You're more able to do these things in shape.



*Everything is more enjoyable when you're comfortable. Image: Camelbak*

### **The 3 Types of Fitness**

#### **1. Aerobic Fitness**

Being aerobically active conditions our bodies to be more efficient: more efficient at moving oxygen around, more efficient because we're carrying fewer stores of fat, more efficient because our muscles are stronger and more capable of shuttling waste by-products away, and more efficient in a thousand more ways that are increasingly technical, biological, and un-bloggable!

Stopping 'for a breather' on the track takes on a different dimension when you're not fighting



for air. You now have time to appreciate the birdsong, take a photo, or help your companion with something. It's no longer a gasping, desperate experience; you can now stop to smell the flowers.

### 2. Strength

One of our biggest complaints on the trail is the uphill/downhill stuff. Let's face it: cruising along the flat ground is easy – but as soon as we start adding altitude, it hurts. Mainly it's in the legs, and those front quads are the muscles doing most of the work.

We've all felt that aching, burning feeling after a few minutes of hard slog up a slope. This is the lactic acid build-up in our legs; a result of the effort our quads are putting in, contracting hard to pull our hips up over our knees with every upward step.

There's nothing wrong with feeling the burn – but if it hurts so much that you're stopping every minute to rest, gasping in pain, or – worst of all – cramping up, then it's worth thinking about ways to mitigate the discomfort.

When we stop, it gives our bodies a chance to 'flush' the lactic acid out of our muscles, restore that oxygen to them, and allow them to reset for another slog. What we find, however, is that by strengthening (or conditioning) our muscles before a hike, they are better equipped to handle contractions. They're more able to expel the lactic acid, and probably produce less of it in the first place.

A suggested way to condition your muscles to the rigours of the trail is to exercise them in a way that imitates the actions and stresses placed on them. This means weighted leg exercises at the gym – for example, front barbell squats and seated leg presses. The aim is to increase the muscles' capacity to push and to strengthen the muscle via simulation.

### 3. Stamina

While weight training is a recommended way to strengthen or bulk muscle, it has its drawbacks.

Firstly, we can only do so much (e.g. 10-15 repetitions) before we tire and need to rest. This pattern isn't necessarily what we want to replicate on the trail. If we conditioned our body to output 100% for 15 steps, but then needed to rest it for three minutes, we wouldn't get anywhere.

This is why it can be a good idea to develop the muscle's ability to flush away waste by-product; introducing steady but strenuous exercise, like cycling.

Using the gears on a bike, we can make the work as hard or easy as we like. The continual motion forces our bodies to flush away lactic acid on the go, as opposed to in between weighted sets.



*By strengthening (or conditioning) our muscles before a hike, they are better equipped to handle contractions.*

## So... How Should I Train for a Multi-Day Hike?

### Get Used to the Food

The food you take on a multi-day hike will come down to personal preference, but your food decisions should be based on two factors: weight and calories. All your food should be relatively lightweight but heavy on calories, so you can benefit from the energy hit you need. Ensure you're well-fuelled while training for a long hike, as it's a good opportunity to become familiar with the foods. Some that are lightweight but calorie-dense include Snickers bars, Peanut M&Ms, trail mix, wraps, [Clif Bars](#), packet pasta, tuna (in a sachet, not a tin), beef jerky, and [freeze-dry meals](#) (if you're carrying a stove). For more guidance on hiking food, check out our [Go-Getter's Guide to Adventure Fuel](#), or [Food Planning Tips for a Multi-Day Hike](#).

### Gear

The point to remember is that you don't necessarily need the lightest gear and clothing on the market. There is thought to be a 'good weight' and a 'bad weight' when it comes to gear – so if you have a jacket that weighs a kilo but will keep you warm at night, take it with you. Wear your trekking clothing while you train to get used to it too.

To get your pack 'game fit' and ensure the load is balanced correctly, consider stuffing it with the gear you intend to take on your hike. Weights and bottles filled with water may help weigh the pack down, but it won't sit the same way a [properly packed rucksack](#) does.

### Pack Weight



If you know you'll be carrying anywhere between 15-20kgs on your trip, start by going on hikes with only 5kgs in your backpack. Once you become familiar with that weight, bump it up to 10kgs – and so on.

The key is to not shock your body straight away. You're better off familiarising your body with a significant load on your back gradually. That way, when it comes to doing that 45km hike, your body won't be screaming at you on day one.

### **Get Used to Hiking... by Hiking**

Becoming physically ready for a multi-day hike can be determined by a number of things, including the distance of the overall trip, how many days are spent out on the trail, how difficult the track is, and so on.

Practicality is key. If you want to come away from that 45-kilometre, 3-day hiking trip feeling fit, simply going to the gym isn't always enough. Just as your gym exercises should mimic your movements on the trail, getting out onto the trail to replicate what you plan to be doing is just as beneficial, if not more. For example, if you know there will be hilly terrain, find a trail that also features plenty of hills and start hiking those bad boys!

There are some great day hikes near Melbourne that are perfect for training, as there are for those training in Adelaide, Perth, and Brisbane. As suggested earlier, hike these tracks with some weight in your backpack too.



Getting out onto the trail to replicate what you plan to be doing is beneficial. Image: John Feeney

***Have you got any suggestions for aligning your 'Circadian Rhythm'? If so, tell us in***



## Why Hiking is Better Than the Gym

***the comments section below!***