



New Hiker FAQ

Welcome to the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC)! This frequently asked questions (FAQ) page is intended for people who are new to hiking and are not sure how to choose a hike to match their ability level, how to register for a hike, what to bring for a day in the outdoors as well as what to expect during the hike. The Southeastern Massachusetts (SEM) Chapter of AMC organizes hikes year-round and the hikes vary in terms of length and degree of difficulty. It is important for new hikers to perform an honest self-assessment of their current hiking abilities in order to maximize their safety and enjoyment as well as the safety and enjoyment of the other hikers in the group. Below you will find description codes that will help you choose, prepare for, and equip yourself for a hike that matches your strength and stamina. Also please feel free to contact the hike leaders of the hike you might be interested in if you have any further questions.

Who may participate on an AMC hike?

AMC welcomes all adults. If you are physically able to participate in the activity described, are equipped with the appropriate clothing, gear, & supplies, and there is still space available, we will welcome you on the activity.

Purchasing gear can get expensive and we want hiking to be accessible to all, so we try to keep required gear to the minimum needed for a safe and enjoyable hike. Often leaders will list both required and optional gear. Many of our local hikes require no more than sturdy shoes, wicking clothes, and a small pack to carry water, snacks, and rain gear.

On SEM winter hikes or multi-day backpack hikes the leaders may be able to lend you a pair of snowshoes, a tent, or other expensive gear so you can experience the activity once or twice to decide if the activity is for you prior to purchasing your own gear.

AMC membership is not required to participate on hikes. We do however appreciate it when you become a member. To join our SEM Chapter, click [here](#).

Can I bring a child or pet on the hike?

Children are welcome on some hikes. These are usually listed as “Family Friendly”, and the child must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. Pets are generally not permitted on hikes unless they are a service animal. Some hikes may be listed as “Pet Friendly”, but you are required to obtain specific prior approval from the hike leader before you bring your pet.

How can I decide which hike would be best for me?

The Appalachian Mountain Club activities are rated using a scale of six levels: Accessible, Relaxed, Easy, Moderate, Vigorous and Strenuous. For more information on the Activity Rating System click [here](#).

If you are a new hiker, it's a good idea to start with easier local hikes held in State Forests, State Parks, conservation areas, and the Blue Hills Reservation before heading up to the mountains of New Hampshire or out to the hills of Western Massachusetts. Start with a slower paced, easier hike rather than a faster paced, more difficult one. Once you start getting into it, you'll be surprised how quickly you'll become ready (both physically and mentally) for more ambitious hikes "up North."

Never choose a hike solely because of its location, no matter how appealing it may sound and once again, you shouldn't be bashful about contacting the respective hike leaders to discuss if you have any concerns.

Do I need to register for AMC hikes?

Most hikes organized by the SEM Hiking Committee require participants to register in advance. After you register for a hike, the leader may follow up with you and ask several questions to help you decide whether that particular hike is appropriate for you based on your recent hiking experience (if any), physical condition, and equipment. Please don't take it as a personal insult if the leader recommends a different hike that they feel might be more appropriate (and enjoyable) for you.

Please note that most hikes that require advance registration also have a group size limit. If the trip status is "Wait Listed," it means the hike leader has accepted the maximum number of hikers for this trip and there is now a waiting list for participation. If it shows as 'Full' even the waitlist is full, and you won't be able to register for the hike. The trip status updates after the leader confirms registrants so a hike may show as open when you register but be waitlisted by the time the leader gets to screen you. The hike leader will screen people based on the order they register. This can be a little confusing initially but be assured SEM hikes are "First Come, First Served" and our hike leaders welcome new participants

Where do I get driving directions to the meeting place?

Hike leaders will provide the location of the trailhead either in the hike description or in an "information sheet" that they will email to you several days before the hike. Of course, it's always a good idea to consult a road map, an online map site, and/or your GPS to review the directions before you leave for the trailhead.

For local hikes consider public transportation when available. For destination hikes, where there is a long drive, consider carpooling when feasible to reduce your carbon footprint. Leaders will sometimes suggest one or two carpooling locations and encourage participants to communicate with each other in advance to maximize carpooling. Drivers should plan to arrive at the trailhead at least 15 minutes before the hike starts so you can don your boots and be ready to go when the group leader starts the hike.

What should I wear and what gear do I need to bring?

The “information sheet” will usually include detailed information on what to wear and what gear is required for that particular hike.

Urban walks and some local hikes may have lesser requirements but in general, you’ll need:

- hiking boots or sturdy shoes (no open toed shoes)
- at least two liters of water in Nalgene-type water bottles or a backpack reservoir/hydration system
- trail snacks and lunch
- full rain/wind gear
- gaiters (for hikes in winter or “mud season” and some hikers wear them as a barrier to ticks in the spring and summer)
- weather-appropriate synthetic or wool clothing, including warm fleece jacket or wool sweater (multiple light layers are better than a single heavy jacket or coat). No cotton jeans or sweatshirts
- warm wool, fleece, or nylon-shelled hat and gloves (mandatory in winter, and a good idea in the mountains any time of the year)
- hiking poles (recommended, but not mandatory)
- headlamp (required for some hikes)
- personal first aid kit, sunscreen, and insect repellent (during bug season)
- toilet paper and baggie
- trash bag
- whistle and compass (recommended for safety)
- pocket knife (optional)
- bandana (optional)
- foam pad for sitting during breaks (optional, but recommended)
- ID card
- Mylar “space blanket” for emergencies
- daypack to hold all the above

For winter hikes, the leaders may also require light traction devices (such as micro-spikes), full crampons, and/or snowshoes, plus additional clothing layers and an extra hat and gloves.

Many hike leaders will not allow individuals wearing jeans to join a hike. Cotton takes too long to dry, making it uncomfortable in warmer months, and dangerous when the temperature drops (hence the often-repeated expression, “cotton kills”). When stopping for breaks, we cool down quickly and wet cotton clothes could cause hypothermia posing a risk not only to the hiker but to the group as well.

Most hikers wear synthetic clothes, in layers, because they wick moisture away from the skin and dry quickly. You will also need a water-resistant windbreaker with a hood in case of a sudden rainstorm. In cold weather, you’ll also need additional layers of fleece or wool (including a warm hat and gloves). Extra items in your backpack might include a fleece vest, a windbreaker,

two or more extra pairs of gloves in case the first pair gets wet; an extra shirt to change into for the ride home, and always, an extra pair of hiking socks.

A leader can refuse a hiker if they deem the hiker is not attired in a manner appropriate for the conditions.

How do I choose hiking boots that will be right for me?

The first step in choosing hiking boots is to determine what kind of hiking you're most likely to be doing. Except for during the winter season, lightweight hiking shoes or boots are appropriate for local hikes on relatively flat and smooth trails (think Borderland State Park); midweight hiking boots are more appropriate for more rugged Blue Hills or New Hampshire hikes. While, heavyweight hiking boots are usually best for multi-day backpacking trips, some diehards are willing to put up with their heavier weight and stiffness in exchange for the increased protection and support they provide. New hikers should probably choose midweight hiking boots, since these would also be appropriate as you progress to more challenging hikes.

Please note that all heavyweight, most midweight, and even some lightweight hiking boots/shoes require adequate "breaking in" on the street before you hit the trails with them. You'll know when the boot is properly broken in when you can walk for a half hour or so and not feel any discomfort, pressure points, or "hot spots" caused by friction.

For winter hiking, you will want an insulated hiking boot for warmth.

Go to a retailer that offers well-known, quality hiking gear (REI, LL Bean, etc.) and knows how to properly fit you for your hiking boots. A good boot fitter will measure your feet and take note of any conditions, such as pronation, that might require a supportive footbed to get the best possible fit. Take along the socks you like to wear for hiking. Be patient, and if you don't think the selection is broad enough, go to another store. Some stores that offer expert boot fitting will even take returns on boots that have been worn if the boot turns out to be a bad fit.

The boots should be snug at the heel but roomy enough for you to wiggle your toes. One way to test for a good fit is to move your foot forward in the unlaced boot so that your toes touch the front of the boot. There should be just enough room for your forefinger to fit between your heel and the back of the boot. If you are an in-between size, have the boots fitted to your larger foot and try using a more cushioned insert, or heavier sock, in the boot for your smaller foot. Sporting goods stores that cater to hikers will have a slanted ramp that you can walk up and down to test the boots for comfort when walking up and down hills.

How much food and water should I bring for a day hike?

Bring lunch (usually a sandwich or two), trail snacks (such as chocolate, a granola bar, and/or fresh or dried fruit), and a minimum two liters of water (three liters when the temperature is over 80 degrees). In cold weather, some hikers also bring a thermos of hot tea or soup. Never skimp on water; it's your own responsibility to stay properly hydrated, which helps prevent fatigue, cramping, heat stroke (in summer), and hypothermia (in winter). It's a good idea to eat and drink

periodically during the hike to keep up energy levels and reduce the possibility of cramping especially during a moderate to strenuous hike. Some hikers add electrolytes to their water. In extreme cold weather cut up your food into bite size pieces as food can freeze during the hike making it hard to chew.

After you have hiked various distances in different weather conditions, you will have a better idea of how much water and food you need. You should always carry some extra food, such as high-energy bars, in case you experience a delay or if you feel hungry on the trip back home.

What is the role of the leader?

It's the leader's responsibility to plan and organize the hike and to guide the group, from the designated meeting place until the time of departure. The leader's decisions about the route and group conduct are final. AMC leaders are trained volunteers who want to provide an enjoyable day in the woods, so it is important to follow their guidance and observe all park regulations and club rules. Mountain hikes, especially during the winter, will often have more than one leader to help keep the group safe. Some hikes, in addition to the qualified leader, may have a 'Leader in Training'. The Leader-In-Training is there to assist the leader, who may delegate certain roles to that person. Keep in mind that hiking involves a certain element of risk and that your personal safety is your responsibility, not the leaders, and that lack of preparation on your part can adversely impact the group.

What is the role of the sweep?

The hike leader will designate someone to serve as a sweep before the hike begins. The sweep will be the last person of the hiking group. The sweep's role is to ensure that the group stays together without too much of a gap between hikers and to alert the leader should there be a reason for the group to stop. Hikers should always remain behind the designated leader and in front of the sweep during the hike to help ensure that no one gets lost or left behind. Never leave the group unannounced for a solo separation!

What if I want to go faster than the group or if I can't keep up?

It is best to remain with the group even if you feel that the pace is too slow. If you find that you cannot keep up with the group, let the leader know as early in the hike as possible, since they may have to assign another leader to walk you back to the trailhead. Never turn back on your own without discussing with the leader. If you choose to leave the group on your own after notifying the leader, you will no longer be part of the AMC activity from that point on. If there are enough leaders on a SEM hike, the group can be divided into nominally "faster" and "slower" groups to accommodate different hiking speeds. Remember to read the hike descriptions carefully so you can choose a hike appropriate for your ability.

Should I disclose pre-existing health conditions to the hike leader?

You are encouraged to tell the leader of any pre-existing health conditions during the screening process that could be an issue on the hike. This can be helpful in determining if the planned hike

is a good fit for you. It could also be helpful should you experience a health emergency during the hike that leaves you incapacitated and in need medical assistance. It's important to understand that hike leaders are volunteers and are not licensed healthcare providers.

Can I use my cell phone on a hike?

Cell phone usage is not allowed except in the case of an emergency or special situation, in which case it should be used away from the group during a designated break and after you inform the leader so you don't get left behind by accident. Otherwise, cell phones should be turned off during hikes.

What if I need to go to the bathroom during a hike?

The hike leader will announce "separation breaks" periodically during the hike in which male and female participants will move out of sight of each other to perform the needed bodily functions. If you need a separation break before the leader calls one, let the leader know.

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