

2026 Member Guide to Ascending Hikes

or Finding Your Place in CMC's Trip Schedule

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[Read Our CMC Webpage About the Ascending Hikes Section Concept](#)



There is a lot of material in this Guide. **Don't feel you have to read everything at once.** But if you can eventually review all of it plus all the linked additional resources, it should help you become a much better hiker, however you define that for you. You will set your own success standard and may adjust it from time-to-time.

How to find upcoming Ascending Hikes: Make sure your profile shows you registered for instant notice of AHS trips and newsletters. That way you can sign up immediately or be ready to sign up when the trip opens for registration. You also can search all the trips in a "find trips" search by using the search box term Ascending. (Note: if no Ascending Hikes are calendared, no hikes will appear.) Don't see an Ascending Hike-labeled trip that fits your schedule? Search for any hikes offered at the difficulty rating and date you want. The program runs year round with snowshoeing and spike hiking in winter.

Note about when "the hike is full": Although many hikes on the calendar say "full," sign up anyway because waitlists almost always clear. To help yourself, ask the office to add you as a member of all area groups and sections you are interested in, including Ascending Hikes. Some sections send emails at a regular time per month with all the upcoming trips plus hints and happenings. Also, sign up at your profile for instant notice when a new activity is posted at the CMC calendar, narrowing down the notices to only the type you are interested in seeing.

The Medical Warning and Waiver. This Guide is prepared by CMC volunteers for CMC members. We are regular hikers just like you, not fitness experts, trainers, or doctors. We are sharing what has worked for us and other hikers we have led. *Always consult your medical provider before engaging in strenuous exercise. The CMC Membership Liability Waiver you signed when you became a member and that renews every year applies to this document and to Ascending Hikes. Review it again [here](#).*

Table of Contents

Part 1. Introduction - Why Are We Here?

- [What The Ascending Hikes Program is Designed to Do](#)
- [General Hiking Fitness Observations That May Challenge Your Thinking](#)
- [We Offer Different Kinds of Trips For Different Needs](#)

Part 2 Understanding Trail Demands

- [Chapter 1. About Trail Steepness and Defining Elevation Gain](#)
- [Chapter 2. Understanding Hiking Pace: Definitions](#)
- [Chapter 3. What Pace Means in a CMC Hike Definition](#)
- [Chapter 4. Choose Hikes Right For You Based On Estimated Pace](#)
- [Chapter 5. Group Safety is Everyone's Concern and Will Make You a Better Hiker](#)

Part 3 Understanding Adjustments You Can Make and Techniques You Can Learn

- [Chapter 6. What Factors Affect Your Hiking Performance on Any Particular Day?](#)
- [Chapter 7. Your Body's Natural Capabilities and Limits](#)
- [Chapter 8. Movement – Your Stride, Using Arms, Using Hiking Poles](#)
- [Chapter 9. Eat and Drink on the Trail to Maximize Performance](#)
- [Chapter 10. Don't Be Surprised About Altitude Sickness](#)
- [Chapter 11. Don't Worry About Being at the Back of the Pack](#)

Part 4 [Links to Additional Resources](#) including, especially for new CMC members, read the important [Trail Etiquette and Related Suggestions](#)

Part 1 Introduction. Why Are We Here?

When new members talk about improving their hiking fitness, they usually say something like:

"I went on that hike, but I couldn't keep up with the other hikers."

or

"How do I know what kind of hike I should sign up for? I am afraid I will not be able to keep up!"

or

"I don't want to do a "forced march," I want to stop and take photos, look at wildflowers, and talk to friends."

Our response?

Your perception of your own hiking ability (or lack thereof) is correlated with a number of factors. The above questions require an understanding of "hiking pace," which varies among different members, different hike categories, and various conditions in place at the hike location. If you improve your overall fitness and stamina, your average hiking pace may increase. **But hiking technique, movement, agility, balance, and equipment choices are important too. Once you understand each of them, you can work toward improving each of them and that will improve your overall hiking ability.**

How to Start Thinking About Your Part in the Program – [The Member Self-Assessment Tool](#)

What the Ascending Hike Program is designed to do:

1. *Understand what it will take to improve your personal hiker performance, the kind of hikes your body is best suited to, and where you might always struggle a bit.*
 2. *Expand your Front Range hiking horizons – See different, uncrowded places you might not otherwise find or venture to on your own, experience different trip types ranging from rambles to scrambles, and learn how to operate on different terrain surfaces and at high elevation.*
 3. *Hike with veteran CMC members, providing informal opportunities to ask questions if you are new to Colorado or to hiking or to the CMC.*
 4. *Learn about the CMC schools, clinics, and sections — where can you find the activities and people that are a best fit for you?*
 5. *Learn about the trip planning process, route-finding, and navigation.*
 6. *“Tune up” for summer or return to hiking after injury or travel.*
 7. *Improve your confidence and joy in Colorado hiking.*
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AHS Trip Types. Over time, we have learned that different members need different kinds of hikes at various times in their journey. Prior Wilderness Trekking or Day Hiker School is recommended for everyone, but not required to participate in AH trips. Ascending Hikes offers graduates of those programs the “next step” in learning. Members without such a course may be motivated to enroll in those foundational schools. Ascending Hikes will have one of these labels:

- **"Ascending - Seasonal Fitness"** (for all CMC members). Most Trip Leaders offer this kind of trip. No teaching component, just longer and higher trips with fewer and shorter stops, as the season progresses. Join in wherever you think you'll fit. Meet other members, both new to the club and long-time members just looking to shape-up for the season or participating in a “recovery” hike. The Trip Leader (and experienced members) will provide advice and feedback if you ask for it.
- **"Ascending - Endurance"** (for CMC all members). “Endurance” training teaches various methods for increasing trail competence. So far our trip leaders have offered one day clinics on the “new alpinism” method of building up stamina through heart rate monitoring and Chi Walking techniques to improve body mechanics on the trail, especially hiking uphill. Some leaders post very long, high-gain trips designed to get you ready for long trails.
- **"Ascending - Walking Wounded"** (low-key trips for hikers building up their fitness from ground zero). The “Walking Wounded” program offers the AHS concept to members starting back after illness or injury. Also a pleasant recovery hike after a tough week. Gentle, mostly flat walks with a congenial group.

- **"Ascending - Skill Builder"** Designed especially for inexperienced members but ALL ARE WELCOME. Trip Leaders concentrate on coaching, new experiences, and CMC acculturation, especially items that new or experienced members haven't encountered before, such as beginner bouldering, stream crossings, or ridge walking . There may be a zoom meeting ahead to ensure safety protocols are understood.
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Factors We May Work On During Any Ascending Hike, at the Trip Leader's Discretion:

- Maximize personal fitness**
 - Core strength
 - Physical balance
 - Speed
 - Breathing
- Enjoy all kinds of terrain**
 - High-elevation travel
 - Off-trail travel
 - Stream crossings
 - Scrambling
 - Steep climbs
 - Difficult surfaces
- Be an active participant**
 - Read and understand *all* trip details
 - Route-finding
 - Navigation
- Travel efficiently to keep up**
 - Fewer breaks on the trail
 - Minimal picture-taking
 - Consuming sufficient water as you hike
 - Consuming appropriate nutrition as you hike
- Prepare thoughtfully at home, to minimize on-trail fussiness**
 - Pack weight
 - Gear checks
 - Functionality of various equipment choices
 - Using hiking poles properly
 - Download and carry the route
- Understand CMC options**
 - CMC Schools, possible pathways and goals (be open to new ones!)
 - How the various CMC Hiker Sections differ (Ascending Hikes, Bobcats, RMOTHG, Octo Hikes, Trailblazers)
- Learn from others on the trail**
 - Trip Leaders and experienced member assistants may provide individual advice
 - All questions answered – any question is a good question!
- Stretch yourself beyond what you thought possible**

- Gain skill and confidence in all of the above
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General Hiking Fitness Observations To Challenge Your Thinking

All of the following points your leaders have either experienced themselves or heard about from their Ascending Hikers. See if any of these issues and their solutions challenge your assumptions about barriers to your own personal improvement. Sometimes it's just re-thinking the challenge that makes hiking improvement possible.

1. Sign up for trips of ever-increasing difficulty. Start with a hike that reflects what you believe is your current ability level and work up from there. Vary your trips over time in terms of distance hiked, elevation gain, trailhead elevation, and highest elevation reached. Each of these factors challenges the body differently, and each requires its own strategy.
2. You need to hike a trip or do another cross-training activity that challenges you *at least* twice a week plus, perhaps, a shorter, easier "recovery hike." Only a few minutes available? Do a speed walk around your block or up and down some stairs.
3. Working out on a treadmill, rower, stationary bike, or elliptical definitely can help your aerobic capacity, but does not provide the same muscle training as hiking because your legs are *not carrying your entire body weight nor carrying a loaded pack*.
4. Most members spend a lot of time on "Moderate" rated hikes before tackling "Challenging" rated trips. Expect to improve noticeably and to gain confidence as time passes but know it may take YEARS to top out at your very best hiker self.
5. Improving your hiking stamina may, at times, challenge your legs and lungs. Don't get discouraged. Instead, enroll in one of our **Ascending Hikes – Endurance Clinics** to get insight on how to stay comfortable while improving.
6. Long conversations on the trail may distract you from concentrating on your technique. If you truly want to improve your hiking, focus on that for a good part of the hike and politely decline long conversations. ***Hikers shouldn't be able to idly chit-chat if they are working hard enough to improve***, i.e. if talking to others results in slowing down, looking back at the person behind them in line, and not thinking about needing a breath.
7. What is different and works to improve aerobic capacity is being able to stay at a sustained speed while ***holding a conversation but needing to take a breath every four or five sentences (but NOT huffing and puffing, or gasping)***. ***This is the heart rate zone where most improvement occurs***. This difference may be lost on persistent talkers but do feel free to say you'd rather not converse, for your own and everyone else's sake. Many hikers prefer to enjoy a hike mostly in silence, so respect others' personal space and keep talk to a minimum. Another reason to hike quietly: Studies show that even quiet hiker conversation has significantly negative impacts on wildlife.
8. If you enjoy trips where people chit-chat, stop frequently for pictures, to look at flowers, etc., choose *casual*-paced hikes for that purpose, or with a listed pace of 1.5. It's ok to do different kinds of trips on different days so long as you join any trip with realistic expectations in sync with the trip leader's described goal. Fast hikers often sign up for more casual trips as "recovery hikes."

9. Summer often is an away-travel time. If you find yourself at a significantly lower elevation for a while, expect to take two or three hiking trips once back in Colorado to return to where you were before you left. That's usually all it takes.
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Part 2 Understanding Trail Demands

Chapter 1. About Trail Steepness and Defining Elevation Gain

Adapted With Permission From Our Friends at the CMC Backpacking Section (BPX)

When first selecting hikes to join, some of us make the mistake of looking mostly at trip distance: "Hey, I walk 6 miles around my neighborhood all the time, so signing up to hike 6 miles is no problem." But elevation gain is one major factor in determining a hike's difficulty. There's a big difference between hiking 3 miles on a flat trail versus 3 miles with a 2,000' elevation gain. There are several types of elevation measurements, so it is important to understand what they mean.

Total Elevation Gain and Loss

Total Gain – The accumulated amount you will be "going up" during the day. For example, if you climb 1000', descend 500', and then climb back up 300', the Elevation Gain is 1,300.' This takes into consideration all the ups and downs, NOT just the difference between the high and low points of the trail.

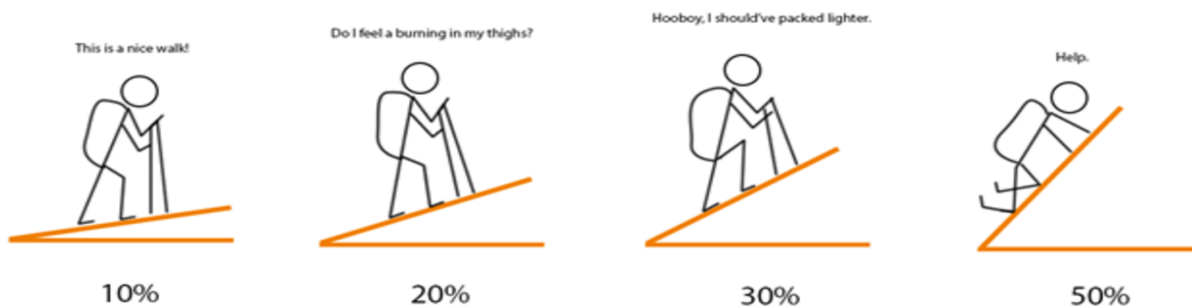
Total Loss – The accumulated amount you will be "going down" during the day. In the example above it is 500'. While we usually focus on gain, going downhill can be as tiring as uphill for some people and puts more stress on leg muscles and joints, especially on rugged, rocky, or steep trails. Also be aware of a trail that starts out going downhill first when you are fresh but then must be hiked back up at the end of the day.

How the Gain and Loss are Distributed Over the Day – How the gain/loss is accomplished — straight up and then straight back down a peak or rolling up and down over the entire course of the hike — makes a huge difference in terms of speed, body stress, and recovery.

Highest Point – This is the maximum elevation reached and could occur at any point in the day. While not as important as the total gain, the air is thinner above 7,000-8,000.' That will usually slow your pace, deplete your energy, increase your dehydration, and cause symptoms like fatigue and headache.

Grade – This measures the steepness of any point on the trail from 0°-90° where 0° is completely flat. Apps like COTREX, Gaia, and AllTrails provide elevation profiles that let you trace the grade as you cursor over the route. You can also get an idea about the grade by looking at the contour lines on a

topo map. Grade gives you a much better feel for what the hike will actually be like. This picture from the [Moore Misadventures Blog](#): [Hiking 101: The Basics of Mileage, Elevation and Routes](#) gives a fun depiction of the impact of grade.



Chapter 2. Understanding Hiking Pace: Basic definitions.

The factor least understood when selecting a trip is “**pace**” or “**average moving speed**.”

Pace is *average speed while actually hiking*, **NOT** counting rest stops, lunch breaks, etc. Then there are all important terrain factors: You may be able to hike eight flat miles easily, but what happens when you must climb steadily uphill, stopping for just a few minutes every half-hour, at a speed set by someone else, at high elevation, off-trail, over boulders, and so forth?

Here are some “moving speed” guidelines. (NOTE: the following and the CMC pace ratings are aimed at the average hiker, able to hike once or twice a week. **Young, fit hikers who hike frequently, trail runners, mountaineers, etc., usually maintain a regular hiking moving pace of 3.0 to 4.0 or even higher.**)

Trip Pace: Average Moving Speeds (mph)		
Casual	Moderate	Fast
0.5 mph to 1.4 mph	1.5 mph to 2.4 mph	2.5 mph to 4.0++ mph

In contrast, “**overall trip pace**” or “**average trip speed**,” is based upon “**total trip time**,” which includes all moving time **PLUS** stops. As an example, at the end of a hike you may have recorded an average **moving pace** of 2.3.mph but your **overall average pace** is 1.8 mph because you stopped for lunch and bio-breaks.

A typical CMC Moderate hike (10 miles/2000') by a typical trip leader probably maintains close to a 2.0 to 2.3 mph pace or "moving average," with minimal 5 minute stops every half hour or so for clothing adjustments (short), water/food breaks (shorter still), and bio-breaks (longer).

Lunch breaks typically are no more than 20 to 30 minutes but will be considerably shorter if the weather is poor. Uphill moving pace may be slower than average (say, 1.5 mph) and downhill faster

(say, 2.5 mph) with fewer and shorter stops, **but a good rule-of-thumb is to add 30 trip minutes per 1,000 feet of trip ascent.** To illustrate, that typical 10-mile trip with 2000' elevation gain probably will require.....

Moving Time:	5 hours (10 miles ÷ typical moderate 2.0 mph)
Uphill climb:	+ 60 minutes additional (2,000' x 30 minutes per 1,000')
Lunch:	+ 20 minutes
Stops:	+ 30-40 minutes minimum (5-10 minutes x est. 6-8 breaks during the hike)
Total time:	5 hours + 60 minutes + 20 minutes + 40 minutes, or maybe 7 hours total time trailhead to trailhead . That makes overall average speed : 1.4 to 1.5 mph (10 miles ÷ 7 hours).

Chapter 3. What Pace Means in a CMC Trip Description.

In a CMC trip description, the trip leader will give an estimated *moving* speed. Most trip descriptions list trip pace as “Moderate,” but individual leaders vary in what that means to them and the leader will set a pace that suits the leader. Every leader’s pace varies within the above ranges, meaning: “sometimes we’ll go faster (e.g., on a flat, open trail) or slower (e.g., picking our way through an off-trail boulder field).”

But it is crucial to understand the context: **pace is relative depending on the hike classification.** CMC Easy hikes are slower than Moderate hikes, which are slower than Challenging hikes, which are slower than Difficult Hikes, because typical members who sign up for these trips are naturally and progressively faster. In other words, the higher the hike rating, the faster the “moderate” moving speed *and* less frequent the stops.

When everyone on a hike is fast, the hike goes fast regardless of the listed pace. But if one person can’t keep up, some or all the group will slow down to accommodate that person. That’s part of CMC etiquette, especially for new members just figuring out what they can do. The leader may put you in front, so others must match YOUR pace. This is preferable to frequent waiting.

By the way, a leader may set prerequisites to join a hike, such as “member must have completed WTS or Day Hiker,” or “all participants must have climbed a 14’er in the last 90 days,” or “must obtain leader’s permission to sign up,” etc. If the leader doesn’t know you, the leader likely will check your CMC Profile (so make sure that is up to date) then check in with you prior to trip day, to make sure the trip is appropriate for you. This is for everyone’s benefit.

Ascending Hike Section trips are never at a casual pace. In fact, “casual” is rarely listed and is usually an emphatic statement by the trip leader that he or she intends to go slowly and make many stops. Nature or wildflower hikes usually designate this pace, and this perfectly proves the overall point. A flower hike’s “overall trip speed” may be 0.5 mph while the leader’s moving average speed or “pace”

can approach 2.5 mph as the group moves from place to place, then stops for observation and commentary. In that case, the goal is to linger at many stops rather than get to a summit, viewpoint, or other destination.

Chapter 4. Choosing Hikes Right For You Based On Estimated Pace

Usually a Trip Leader will state the planned hiking pace in the trip details. Keeping in mind that hike distance, elevation gain, high point elevation also matter, so how do you know you can do the hike? Be sure to read the Leader Notes to see if the leader has provided any clarifying information.

Start with this: What is your own natural moving speed/mph on city streets? What about going up or down a hill? Again, let's revisit the below chart to compare your own pace with leader-estimated pace, then imagine the addition of some or all the factors listed above on pages 1 and 2. Finding your own comfortable, sustainable pace is key. Many hikers find their "talking pace" (a pace at which they can comfortably hold a conversation) is a good indicator of an efficient and **sustainable** speed.

Trip Pace: Moving Average Speeds (mph)		
Casual	Moderate	Fast
0.5 mph to 1.4 mph	1.5 mph to 2.4 mph	2.5 mph to 3.5+ mph

So, if you think an Easy hike will be too slow, and **most new members will think so**, try a Moderate hike. Feel free to advise the leader and fellow hikers that you are a new member still figuring out your pace. No one will think the worse of you. They know that someone's trip experience will be adversely affected if they have trouble keeping up while the group is moving. Everyone has that experience from time-to-time. So, **do not hesitate** to let the group know if you need to slow down or stop to rest. Even veteran members will "bonk" occasionally if they fail to eat or hydrate often enough.

Experienced CMC members learn what pace they typically can do on an average day, and then seek out leaders and other hikers who match that pace. How do you do that when every leader is different? On every trip, ask the people on that trip about other leaders they know who are comparable, faster, slower, more stops, fewer stops, etc. It's a networking skill.

Revealing you are new to the Club will result in an outpouring of friendly advice. That's also the CMC way. Eventually, you will find many trip leaders whose paces and styles are just right for you.

Of course, as you hike more often, you may find yourself speeding up naturally as you gain confidence and conditioning!

Chapter 5. Group Safety is Everyone's Concern and Can Help You Become a Better Hiker

CMC's Trip Leaders are volunteers trained to put member safety above all other trip factors. To do that effectively, they need the entire group to participate. A Trip Leader's favorite hikers are those who practice situational awareness: help route-find, navigate, share the trail lead, sweep at the back, listen and look out for how everyone else is doing, be prepared to assist with first aid incidents, watch surroundings for animals, wildfire smoke, and trail hazards, watch the weather, etc., etc. They never just rely on the trip leader. Paying attention in this way will make you a better hiker and a better hiking companion.

Everyone must carry their own 10 essentials and gear appropriate for the trip. This is good discipline for managing your own adventures as well. All CMC classes have a safety component, starting with [Wilderness Trekking School](#) and its hybrid alternative [Day Hiker School](#). For new hikers or anyone new to Colorado, we recommend at the very least the one-evening [Hiker Safety Seminar](#) and its excellent CMC Press companion [Hiking Safety Handbook](#).

Many CMC hikers get in the hiker line and begin chit-chatting with friends without paying much attention to the trip's progress. The best hikers take classes that focus on [safety and survival skills](#) for the CMC activities they participate in. We recommend that every CMC member attend at some time at least one session of [Wilderness First Aid](#), [Avalanche Terrain Avoidance](#), [Wilderness Survival School](#), and [Backcountry Incident Management School](#).

Part 3 Understanding Adjustments You Can Make and Techniques You Can Learn

Chapter 6. Factors To Consider When Assessing Your Own Hiking Fitness

Factors to Be Understood and Worked On During Ascending Hikes:

- Your overall personal fitness level
- Your core strength and physical balance capabilities
- The power of your hiking stride
- Whether you know how to use hiking poles properly
- How you respond to certain terrain, speed, elevation, and difficult surfaces
- If you are consuming sufficient water and appropriate nutrition *as you hike*
- Can you stretch your presumed abilities beyond what you thought possible?

Factors You Can Control:

- Choosing a hike that you will be able to complete
- If you started the day well-rested or tired
- Whether you decide to carry on a long conversation during the hike (yes, it matters) – When you talk on the trail you will naturally slow down and perhaps turn your body to hear another

- person and to make yourself heard. Devote your breath first to keeping up.
- The comfort, stability, and traction capability of your hiking boots
- The pack weight you are carrying
- The functionality of your various equipment choices
- Elimination of any “fussy” equipment or practices that requires stops or otherwise take time – a minute here and there adds up

Factors Related to the Trip You Choose:

- Whether you understand the trip description: speed, distance, etc. because this sets up your expectations
- The elevation and trail steepness at the start
- The elevation at which you will be moving throughout the day
- The speed of the leader and/or the rest of the group
- The distance to be hiked
- The steepness, length, and variation of any climbs/descents
- Whether traveling on-trail or off-trail
- The hiking surface: snow, ice, boulders, gravel, scree, talus, mud
- The thickness of the vegetation you are passing through
- How often the group stops to rest

Factors You Cannot Control (but can still work on):

- Your body’s type: natural abilities, limits, and difficulties
- Particular sensitivity to heat or cold
- How long it takes your body’s muscles to “warm up”
- How often your body needs to refuel with food and water
- Any medical issues that you are treating as best you can, (ex. asthma, allergies) but the effects still linger
- How your body reacts to elevation gain and altitude on any given day

Chapter 7. Your Body’s Natural Capabilities and Limits

Do you find yourself in awe of those elite athletes who conquer 14’er peaks in mere hours, or professional players dominating the court and field? We instinctively recognize that while foundational skills are accessible to most, not everyone—no matter how rigorous the training—is destined for the professional leagues or the ability to scale sheer cliffs with effortless grace.

Maximizing your personal **hiking ability** is simply a smaller-scale version of that reality. Our individual bodies are uniquely suited to certain demands; some will excel at the steady grind of the uphill climb, while others may find their rhythm on the descent yet struggle with the opposite. While you can significantly bolster your *speed, strength, and stamina*, you must eventually work within your own genetic potential and what your body can sustainably tolerate.

Several subtle factors influence this, including the age you began your hiking journey, your current age, muscle composition, joint health in your knees and hips, and lung capacity. If ascending a steep grade

feels like an impossible task, you might be surprised to find fellow hikers who find the uphill easy but struggle immensely with the jarring impact of a long descent. You won't truly know your personal limits until you challenge them repeatedly over time. **But that very effort is what drives improvement, so keep pushing your boundaries.**

The trail demands you will likely find most challenging are steep slopes—whether ascending, descending, or both—and the thin air found at *higher elevations* (such as those above 10,000'). There is simply no substitute for practicing in these actual conditions to facilitate improvement. **Proper use of hiking poles can be a significant help in managing these hurdles.**

Here are some first steps you can take to get you started with more efficient walking and hiking.

Step 1. Alignment. Posture matters even on the trail. Start by aligning your body vertically and horizontally. Point your feet, lower abs, nose, and eyes in the direction you intend to go. Stand up straight through the crown of your head, lean forward just enough that your shoulders are over your hips, keep your chin parallel to the ground and eyes forward, relax your shoulders, and engage your core. Check in with your posture before and during your hikes until good posture becomes a habit.

Most people walk with their feet splayed out at a 30° angle, which is inefficient and drains energy. This demands your body to make various adjustments for balance and movement, leading to energy drain and inefficiency. Instead, point your feet straight ahead and straighten your neck to keep the crown of your head up, as if suspended by a string. Engage your lower abdomen so your shoulders are over your hips, and your hips are over your ankles. Use a mirror if necessary. Hold this position to get used to feeling and visualizing your body parts in alignment. You want to develop muscle memory for this.

When going up a gradual hill, lean from the ankles rather than from the waist to avoid lower back pain. You can think of hills as falling into two broad categories: gradual uphill and steep uphill. In both cases maintain a short stride length so your foot does not land in front of your hip. The steeper the hill the smaller the stride length. At times it may be best to use a sidestep or "French technique" for your steps, especially as hills become steeper.

Step 2: Relax. Avoid the tendency to over-tighten your core or lower back. Instead, engage your muscles gently and lean forward just enough from the ankles to let gravity assist your forward momentum. If you have recently adjusted your alignment, this relaxed state may feel a bit unfamiliar at first, but keep practicing until it becomes second nature. *Maximizing your hiking form is a dual process of finding proper alignment and maintaining a relaxed physical state.*

Looking forward rather than down at your feet can be a challenge. We instinctively worry about a misstep on rugged terrain, but staring straight down puts unnecessary strain on the neck. Further, break the habit of "tailgating" the hiker in front of you. **Maintain a buffer of at least six to ten feet.** This simple adjustment provides everyone space to maneuver and allows your brain to scan the trail ahead efficiently without compromising your posture.

Step 3: Practice a steady cadence. Hiking is an endurance activity, so it is a good idea to think about going out at a slower pace while you warm up. A subtle but common pitfall is attempting to hike too quickly immediately from the trailhead or tackling a steep ascent before your body is ready. Every hiker possesses unique muscle "warm-up" requirements, and your fellow members certainly understand this.

Do not hesitate to advise the trip leader if you require additional time or a reduced speed to properly acclimate. Consistent practice will help you develop the muscle memory necessary for an efficient, sustainable cadence. Learning to keep a steady cadence with the use of a metronome app can keep you from going out too quickly.

Step 4: Breathe deeply and regularly. Your body requires a steady oxygen supply to function at peak efficiency. Difficulty breathing while on the trail may stem from insufficient "warm-up" time or the sheer effort of a sudden steep climb or maintaining a group pace. Remember, every hiker reaches a performance ceiling based on their body's real-time ability to synthesize energy. Pushing beyond this limit often leads to "bonking" (see Chapter 9). Anxiety can exacerbate the issue by causing shallow breathing. Pay attention to your body and allow your leaders and fellow hikers to support you. What to do?:

- *If you find yourself getting out of breath, first try increasing the depth and/or rate of your breathing to see if that allows you to maintain the group's speed. If it works, you have more lung capacity than you are using. Remember to work on this every time!*
- *If deeper/faster breathing does not resolve your ability to maintain the group's pace, you'll need to either (1) stop and catch your breath with a brief rest, after which you may be able to keep up with the group at a sustainable breathing rate, or (2) slow down to a pace that you can sustain. Either the rest will restore your ability to maintain the group's pace, or you do not currently have the ability to maintain that pace. If the latter, the trip leader will need to make decisions that will keep all the members safe. In any case, be sure the trip leader is aware of your situation.*
- *Our leaders have experience with this and may choose to: 1) reduce the speed of the entire group; 2) place you at the front to set a sustainable pace, which is often more efficient than constant waiting – if asked to do this, please do so; or 3) form a secondary, slower group if a co-leader is present.*
- *Leaders absolutely will not leave anyone alone, even with a co-leader, **so please do not insist.** The final decision rests with the leader based on the specific situation.*

5. Recognize the challenge of hills. Even veteran hikers can find value in adjusting their mechanics to boost efficiency and mitigate leg fatigue, particularly on the ascent. Mastering efficient uphill techniques is essential; practicing these adjustments can significantly enhance your enjoyment while preserving your stamina. A concise overview of effective uphill walking form is available in [ChiWalking](#) (found on [Amazon](#) or [Audible](#), including book and audio formats), which serves as a premier resource for mastering these skills. Additionally, you might consider enrolling in one of the CMC's **Ascending Hikes – Endurance Clinics** to further refine your trail performance.

Chapter 8. More on Hiking Stride and Hiking Poles

If you think of yourself as a "slow" hiker, try adjusting your natural stride over time and swinging your arms strongly in opposition to your legs.

Your Hiking Stride – Legs – Many of us need to restore our flat-surface stride to its natural length. Some of us have developed an unconscious walking style that is inefficient and also promotes injury. **Stride length** is not the actual determinant of how fast we walk. Rather **our cadence** determines our walking speed. After all, other than hiking or competitive running, where do we even think about speed? We might shuffle, stop and start, especially if we work in an office or clinic, walk on busy sidewalks, help children or elders walk, etc. With proper posture your legs will be swinging slightly forward with an emphasis on the **backward swing and increased cadence**. It may feel unnatural at first but keep practicing until you develop some muscle memory.

Your Hiking Stride – Hips – Many of us move our legs out from the front, from the groin, and keep our hips relatively motionless and squared forward. To increase speed, your hips should rotate with each stride front-to-back, not side-to-side. This will happen naturally if you mentally move your legs from the back of the hips. The movement should be subtle but will help move the leg forward and then backward. Avoid overemphasizing the hip motion at first—it will come naturally as you develop your walking stride.

Your Hiking Stride – Arms – We are used to carrying bags, briefcases, keys, etc. so we don't think about swinging our arms strongly, both forward and backward. If you relax your tricep your arm will naturally move forward. Your wrist should not go past the midline of your rib cage. Your elbow should not go forward of your rib cage. Bending your arm at the elbow depends on whether you are walking slowly or quickly. At a slow pace your arm will hardly bend at all but as you increase the pace you will increase the angle of your forearm and hand at the elbow. At your quickest walking pace you will maintain a 90° angle at the elbow. When walking up gradual or steep hills this arm swing changes as the steepness increases. Your arm swing has another important role: When you swing your arms as described at a steady cadence your legs will naturally follow/match that cadence.

Use Hiking Poles -- When using hiking poles, maintain some of the main principles associated with ChiWalking. Keep your strides short, relaxed ankles with a small tilt forward can be facilitated with poles. Pelvic rotation can still be used for control of speed on down hills and power on uphills. Poles tend to force people to use their arms and that is a good thing. Coordination between pole plants and foot placements (opposite with opposite) is a skill that improves with practice, while speed and stability will improve too.

Hiking poles should be thought of as an aid for balance and stability but not relied upon for propulsion. In other words poles do not pull you along. Overusing the arms with poles has the same effect as any overusing any other body part i.e., reduced efficiency, increased fatigue and potential injury. Some hikers use the pole straps (hands in from the bottom) to help carry their weight on their wrists. This is especially effective during an uphill climb.

Some hikers adjust pole height for up or down slopes but that's what a long, textured pole handle is for – to switch your position as needed without stopping to adjust the poles. Part of "speed" involves less stopping, less fussiness.

Chapter 9 – Eat and Drink on the Trail

Many hikers fail to realize that **frequent** refueling and hydrating on the fly is absolutely critical to avoid "bonking." Athletes use this term to describe the point where your muscles simply run out of fuel (See Chapter 7 above). Essentially, you've hit the wall by depleting your body's glycogen stores. When this occurs, you will find yourself unable to continue and forced into a mandatory stop of **at least** 10 to 15 minutes to eat and drink. Don't let this happen to you!

Developing the self-awareness to recognize the early signs of a bonk takes practice. If you pay close attention, you will often feel the onset long before it becomes a critical issue. You may need to politely decline long conversations if that is your usual habit. The moment you feel your body fighting the pace, **even a little bit**, immediately consume some carbohydrates and water. Be sure to wash down those nibbles *every time* with plenty of water.

Constant hydration is a primary defense against bonking. We recommend carrying at least a portion of your water in a bladder system to facilitate drinking on the fly. Having to stop to retrieve a bottle, or asking another hiker to assist you, creates unnecessary trail "fussiness" and slows the entire group. If you have concerns regarding cleanliness or maintenance, consult a veteran bladder user; most hikers who make the switch rarely return to bottles.

When you feel your legs beginning to fail, immediately consume carbohydrates or electrolytes and follow with plenty of water. It typically requires approximately ten minutes for these stores to reach your muscles and for you to feel the revitalizing effects, allowing you to maintain your momentum—provided you have not waited too long to intervene.

Every hiker possesses unique metabolic requirements, and some find they need to refuel far more frequently than others. If you require constant energy, we recommend utilizing a readily accessible "feedbag" to facilitate nibbling on the fly. Remember, true trail efficiency involves **minimizing stops and reducing equipment fussiness**. Some hikers use large cargo pockets or waistband-mounted pouches to ensure food is always within reach; this simple adjustment makes you far more likely to eat **and** prevents group delays. To avoid the gastric distress of a "carb overdose," try consuming a balanced mix of bite-sized carbohydrates, fats, and proteins. If pure sugar upsets your stomach, incorporate savory protein sources like jerky or nuts, or even lightly caffeinated options such as chocolate-covered espresso beans.

Don't forget to incorporate rapid-acting electrolytes, such as chewable Salt Sticks, into your routine. While some popular hydration powders—like LMNT, Liquid IV, Gatorade, or Emergen-C and Nuun tablets – require time to dissolve, many hikers (even dedicated bladder users) prefer to pre-prepare these in a separate carry-bottle for easy access. These products vary significantly in flavor and sugar content, so experiment to find the personal preference that works best for your body.

Chapter 10. Learn to Recognize Altitude Sickness Symptoms.

Once you begin ascending even modest peaks, the most significant risk you may encounter is *altitude sickness* (manifesting as nausea, dizziness, or gastrointestinal distress). This risk is amplified if you fail to

hydrate and refuel constantly with a balanced mix of nutrients or if you attempt to **maintain a pace beyond your body's sustainable limit** just to stay with the pack.

Understand that this happens to *everyone* from time to time, including our most veteran members. The best approach is to start with more accessible goals—perhaps peaks at 9,000' or 10,000'—and then incrementally increase your target by 1,000' each week to *build your metabolic tolerance*. Any hike serves this purpose, but always **advise the trip leader** that you are focused on building your personal altitude acclimation.

Finally, don't fall victim to "14'er fever." Most Front Range 14'ers are overcrowded, and attempting them without proper conditioning can lead to significant problems, sometimes even requiring external rescue. Instead, hone your skills on 10'ers, 11'ers, and 12'ers first; these trails are often quieter and can be **plenty difficult** on their own. Check out resources like 14ers.com (which also lists 13'ers), [AllTrails](http://AllTrails.com), or [CoTrex](http://CoTrex.com), to find your next objective.

Chapter 11. Do Not Worry About Being in the Back, and What Happens if You Fall Further Behind and Can't Recover.

For some new hikers, it is difficult to keep up at the back of the hiking group. However, you may be the only one who cares that you are in the back or knows why. Some people go to the back just to avoid hearing others' conversations. A sweep takes on that position voluntarily and knows the sweep's job is to encourage and stay back with a person who needs a break. Just focus on having fun and remembering why you're out hiking. Maybe next time you will choose a hike with a slower pace OR you can resolve to work on speeding up just a little bit every chance you get.

Do not fall into the mindset that you have "one comfortable speed" and you have no choice but to stick with that. Instead, you can "catch up" with the group from time to time *and* do a little "interval training" (a conditioning technique to increase speed) by accelerating your pace or even jogging a bit on flat ground and downhill slopes. Believe it or not, moving quickly for a minute or even for 20 or 30 seconds during a hike will help you increase your "comfortable speed."

If you feel you are being stretched way beyond your limit from the get-go, **it is acceptable (expected, actually) to ask the trip leader to slow the pace or to drop back to a pace comfortable for you, letting the sweep know**. If you push yourself too hard right up front, you may never recover enough to enjoy the rest of the hike. No one wants that for you, including the trip leader and your fellow hikers.

Caution: If things go really south for you, it may be considered by the group to be similar to a minor injury. In that case the group will be willing to help carry your pack or its contents, put you in front of the line to let you set the pace, etc., to keep you with them. It is easier to follow a slower hiker than to wait every so often for someone to catch up. In some cases the entire group will turn around and return to the trailhead. In extreme cases, it may be OK to sign yourself out of a trip and return to the trailhead, but the leader will be reluctant to let you do this unless someone else accompanies you. Believe it or not, someone usually is willing to do that for you. This is a rare occurrence and should not be used lightly.

Additional Resources:

Trail Basics:

[Leave No Trace Principles](#)

[The Ten Essentials](#)

[Trail Etiquette and Related Suggestions](#)

[Why You Should Use Hiking Poles](#)

[Hiking 101: The Basics of Mileage, Elevation and Routes](#)

[CMC Backpacking Section's Discussion on Elevation](#)

[CMC Recorded Trainings](#) CMC volunteers have created some excellent videos on navigation apps (Gaia, COTrex, AllTrails, Caltopo), personal locator beacons (PLB), nutrition, what to put in your pack ,etc.

Your Personal Hiking Ability:

[These Exercises Will Help You Increase Hiking Stamina](#)

[How to Walk Faster](#)

[8 Tips for Walking Uphill More Efficiently](#)

[How to Hike Downhill](#)

[Improve Your Walking Posture](#)

[How to Speed Walk](#)

Hiking Warm-Up and Prep:

[Stretching & Flexibility](#)

[Flexibility Hints](#)

Go from...

Why would anyone want to do *THAT?* to...

Who would want to do *THAT?* to...

I could **never** do that! to...

I'd **like** to do that but ...

I learned so much in my CMC Classes and practicing with Ascending Hikes.

*Now I **want** to do that and I **can** do that.*