



How to Dress for Hiking

Expert
Reviewed

Four Parts: [Base Layer](#) [Insulating Layer](#) [Shell Layer](#) [Additional Clothing](#)

The way you need to dress for hiking largely depends on the conditions you plan on hiking in. You need significantly less coverage for a quick hike in the heat of summer than you need for an extended hike in the middle of winter. Regardless of the specifics, however, you should wear clothes that wick away moisture from your skin while preventing precipitation from getting you wet. You should also dress in a base, insulating, and shell layer.

Part
1

Base Layer

- 1 Avoid heavy base layers if you plan on hiking in warm weather.** Long underwear is smart for colder weather, but it does not make much sense if you plan on hiking through the woods in the middle of summer.
- 2 Wear the right thickness of thermal underwear for cool weather.** Thermal underwear comes in light, mid, and expedition weights. The colder the conditions and the longer you plan on being out in them, the heavier you should go with.
- 3 Avoid cotton.** Cotton soaks up moisture, meaning that your clothes will get damp, uncomfortable, and may even cause you to catch a chill in cold weather once you start sweating. Cotton is not appropriate if you're hiking in rainy weather.
- 4 Look for fabrics that wick moisture away from your skin.** Merino wool and some silk can accomplish this task, but specially designed synthetic fabrics may do the most thorough job of it. Look for athletic wear that specifically advertises "wick-away" capabilities.
- 5 Choose the right socks for the weather.** Like your base layers, choose synthetic or wool socks to wick away moisture, which can be a cause of blisters. Whether or not you choose a thin or thick sock is a matter of personal preference with a consideration to the outdoor temperatures. In cold wintry weather choose a thick, warm sock. In humid summer weather a thin sock will do.
 - Some people find that layering socks or wearing a thin liner sock under a thicker sock prevents blisters.

Part
2

Insulating Layer

- 1 Dress in layers.** Layering is especially important for cold weather hiking. As you warm up, you can remove some of the layers to prevent yourself from overheating. When you need the extra warmth, you can put the layers back on.
- 2 Stick with short sleeves and shorts when hiking in hot weather.** Your skin needs to breathe, and overheating can cause a variety of health problems. Some people prefer hiking skirts or kilts for even more ventilation. If you want to avoid insects or sun exposure, wear long sleeves and pants made of the most breathable, lightweight material you can find.
- 3 Look for garments that can keep you warm in cold weather.** Long sleeves and long pants are just the start. Vests, jackets, and tights are also important tools you can use to keep yourself warm.
- 4 Wear fabrics that wick away moisture while keeping you warm.** Polyester fleece is a popular option because it is lightweight and breathable. Merino wool and goose down are also common choices, but goose down must be kept dry to remain effective.

- There are new kinds of down that are water-resistant.

**Part
3****Shell Layer**

- 1 Purchase a jacket with a water-resistant exterior and a removable fleece interior for the most versatility.** A basic waterproof exterior keeps you dry during mild to moderate precipitation, regardless of the temperature outside. A fleece interior keeps you warm during the winter, and selecting a removable interior makes it easier to adapt the jacket to warm weather use.
- 2 Opt for a simple windbreaker during warm and slightly cool weather.** Windbreakers prevent you from catching a chill on a breezy day, but they do not provide much insulation for more extreme conditions.
- 3 Look for a waterproof, breathable shell if you plan on braving harsh conditions.** Waterproof shells are designed to carry your perspiration from the inside of your jacket out, while simultaneously preventing large drops of precipitation from finding their way inside the jacket. These jackets are the most useful, but they also tend to be the most expensive.
- 4 Compromise with a water-resistant shell.** These jackets are less expensive than their waterproof counterparts. Tightly woven fabric blocks out wind and light rain, but it will soak through in heavy downpours.
- 5 Remember to wear insulation for cold weather hikes.** Even if your base and mid layers are heavily insulated, your outer layer still needs to provide you with additional warmth.
- 6 Avoid non-breathable shells.** Non-breathable shells are generally very durable and waterproof, but they trap your body heat inside and prevent your skin from breathing. As a result, you risk overheating or getting chilled from being damp.
- 7 Invest in additional features.** Hoods, pockets, and vents are all useful, but they also drive up the price of a jacket. If you plan on hiking seriously, however, you should invest in a hooded jacket with plenty of pocket space and zipper vents that can regulate your temperature.

**Part
4****Additional Clothing**

- 1 Wear hiking boots for the most versatility.** Hiking boots are appropriate for simple and advanced hikes because they provide your foot with good support and protect you from ground-level hazards like thorns and snake bites. Whether or not you want to select a low top or high-top boot is a matter of personal preference. Pick out a pair with waterproofing to keep your feet dry if you will be hiking in wet terrain. Realize that waterproof boots are less breathable in warm conditions.
- 2 Shift to hiking shoes when you need flexibility.** Hiking shoes or trail runners provide you with enough support for even terrain and give you the flexibility you need for hikes that also include some basic rock climbing. Look for hiking shoes with strong, secure grips.
- 3 Remember your hat.** If you plan on hiking in the cold, an insulated cap prevents you from losing too much body heat through your head. If you plan on hiking in warm weather, bring a brimmed hat that can shield your face and neck from the sun.
- 4 Pack gloves for cold weather hikes.** The best gloves are waterproof with a separate cloth interior. A neck gaiter can also provide extra warmth.
- 5 Carry a backpack or fanny pack.** Back packs are best for cold weather, since they offer enough room for you to carry extra layers of clothing along with water and food. Fanny packs are suitable for warm weather, when you do not need to worry about storing extra layers of clothing but still need to carry water and snacks.

Community Q&A

What color clothing is best for hiking?



Light-colored clothing. You're able to be seen better, and it's easier to see when those pesky bugs may have hitched a ride!

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Why do I have to wear so many layers?



To take off in day when it is warm and to put on because it gets very cold at night.

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Tips

- Bring plenty of fluids. Even if your clothes provide you with maximum breathability, you will still sweat. Sweating means that your body is losing water. You must replenish your body's supply of water in order to remain healthy and prevent heat sickness.
- If you are new to hiking, start slowly. Cover easy terrain and short distances before advancing to uneven ground and extended hikes.
- It is important to replenish electrolytes in addition to plain water. Either use a hydration mix that contains electrolytes or make sure you eat salty snacks.

Things You'll Need

- Undergarments
- Shirts
- Shorts
- Pants
- Vests

- Tights
- Jackets
- Heavy coats
- Hats
- Gloves
- Hiking boots or shoes
- Backpack or fanny pack

Sources and Citations

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- <http://www.rei.com/expertadvice/articles/dress+layers.html>

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