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Hiking Gear And Safety Tips For Pets

7 Tips For Safer Hiking With Your Dog

Love to camp and hike? Share it all with your dog—without risking his neck

By Denise Foley



Photograph by Artur Debat / Getty Images

When Steve Goodrich's 3-year-old dog, Boone, sees him get out the backpack, the black Lab leaps for joy. "He goes crazy," says Goodrich, 46, a sales consultant and the author of Best Hikes with Dogs—Georgia. "He loves the trail." But then, Boone has never experienced the outdoor mishaps that befell Goodrich's hiking buddy's dog on the Appalachian Trail. Several years ago, the pooch got sprayed by three skunks and spiked by two porcupines. "Imagine being in the middle of nowhere with a stinking dog or one who's got a bunch of quills in his face," Goodrich says. Fortunately, he and his friend had packed pliers, along with antiseptic wipes and the antihistamine Benadryl, which helped. The stink, however, they had to endure.

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Taking your dog hiking lets you experience his pure joy when he connects with his inner wolf. Here's how to protect him during your adventure.

DON'T GO UNLESS HE WILL COME. "He must come instantly when called, no matter what the distractions," says Ted Cohn, a Colorado-based vet and president-elect of the American Veterinary Medical Association. If you can't train him to heel on command, leashed or not, you can't protect him from the wild things.

PACK HIM UP. With the right gear, such as the Outward Hound Backpack Pet Carrier (\$50; myoutwardhound.com), you can easily hike with your smaller (10- to 15-pound) dog.

PREP FOR PESTS. Be sure distemper and rabies vaccines are current. And before you go, apply her latest dose of flea, tick, and heartworm preventives. If you're hiking where venomous creatures lurk, keep her leashed. The PetTech PetSaver first-aid app (\$4; pettech.net) is worth downloading so you know what to do if disaster strikes.

WARM UP THE NIGHT. There's nothing more pathetic than a chilly pit bull or other thin-furred friend, so bring along a kid-size sleeping bag plus a doggy coat. Even in the desert, nighttime temps can drop to 30°F or below.

GET FOOT GEAR. Dogs you'd never expect to need dog boots can end up too pained to walk after tromping through rocky wilds. Thin boots protect paws while allowing a dog to feel the ground.

TEST FOR H2O GERMS. Slurping stream water is a trail joy, but it can contain parasites like giardia. Get your dog tested within a week after you get home so he can be treated for any bugs he picked up. (He won't get sick right away.)

ADD TO YOUR FIRST-AID KIT. We're talking tweezers, Benadryl, probiotic and fiber supplements for diarrhea; topical calendula and arnica for wounds and bites; and tea bags for compresses to reduce swelling and pain. Also include triple antibiotic ointment, a penlight to check eyes, artificial tears to flush anything out, an EpiPen (if he's allergic to insect stings), a blanket to use as a stretcher, and (duh) a cell phone or radio to call for help. And maybe a muzzle—in case you have to pull out those nasty porcupine quills.

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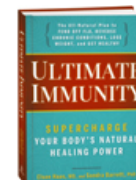
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