

Hygiene

A clean hiker is a happy (and healthy) hiker

A foray into the woods often means you will come out a little bit dirtier than when you went in. The longer the adventure, the greater the accumulation of nature's beauty products: mud, sweat, and other bits of grime. However, just because your clothes have gotten a little dirty doesn't mean they're unhygienic. Use these tips to maintain good hygiene and health while in the backcountry.

Hand sanitizer. Hikers often eschew soap when washing hands because it wastes precious water and can be a hassle to use by oneself. Hand sanitizer, on the other hand, is quick and convenient. Small 1 oz. travel sizes are nearly ubiquitous as people take them to work, school, and on planes. One of these small containers will easily serve several people on an extended trip.

Wash your dishes! Your mom knew what she was doing when she made you share dish washing duties with your siblings. While your cookware doesn't necessarily need to be spotless, clean dishes keep bugs and mice away from your stuff when you're not looking. While some hikers will wash dishes with water and a rag, some will use biodegradable soap for extra cleanliness. If you choose to do so, be sure to only take what you need. Find a small one ounce squirt bottle to fill up instead of taking the family-sized value pack.

The business on Number 2. The only difference between relieving yourself outdoors and at home, is that "going" outdoors does require a little preparation. Before you begin, use a trowel (which is every bit an important piece of group gear as a tent) to dig a "cathole" about 6-8 inches deep. You can use toilet paper, which you will need to pack out, but whenever available, nature's toilet paper, leaves, does a fine job. Carry out the used toilet paper in a resealable plastic bag. Fill the cathole in when you're done and head back to the trail. Have a friend waiting with hand sanitizer or soap so you can clean up before touching anything.

Make your dentist happy. One of the first bits of equipment hikers leave out of their pack to cut weight is their toothbrush. While you can definitely skip it on a day hike, a toothbrush on a long hike is worth its negligible weight. Even if you don't use toothpaste, the brushing motion can remove the grimy plaque.

Keep your water clean. As having extra water is part of the Ten Essentials, you can be sure that you'll want to make sure all your drinking water has been purified. If you don't have a water filter, UV device, or iodine, you can always boil your water so you have enough. Be sure to let it cool down before you put it in your water bottle.

