

# Take precautions when hiking with canines

Coloradoans are an active bunch.

We routinely hike, bike, climb and run our way to the lowest obesity rate in the nation (19.8 percent in 2011.)

A lot of us wouldn't even think of enjoying those activities without our dogs.

Here are some things you may not have considered when you hit the great outdoors with your four-legged friends.

Backpacking is a great activity to enjoy with a dog, but please be sure that your dog is up to the demands of the trip.

Determine how many miles you plan to hike in a day and how heavy your dog's backpack should be. Have your dog practice hiking with the pack that you plan to use with the weight you feel she will need to carry.

A young and healthy dog should be able to carry 25 percent of her body weight, but abilities vary according to breed, fitness and age. Be sure the pack fits snugly, has padding and is properly balanced. By practicing beforehand, you can ensure the pack is safe and comfortable.

Build up your dog's endurance while carrying the pack before committing to a trip of any length.

You want to be confident that your dog will come reliably when called in distracting situations on a backpack trip.

A client recently told me that his wonderful German shepherd came back immediately when called after briefly chasing a bear. Thank goodness she did since both the owner and dog would have been in danger if the dog had caught up with the sow and her cub.

When preparing for the trip, consider your dog's needs, too.

You should carry water and a lightweight water purifier (don't pinch pennies here), bear spray, leash, phone and emergency contact numbers for your veterinarian.

Your dog can help carry some of the water, her food and a first aid kit (you can find a materials list for a good first aid kit at [alphacanineacademy.com](http://alphacanineacademy.com) on the "training resources" page.)

You also might want to have Musher's Secret on hand. It's a dense wax coating used in many dog sports to protect a dog's paw pads.

You also will need to store your food and your dog's kibble in a bear-proof container or learn a bear bag hanging method that works for you.

And you should be sure your dog has her ID tags on and a bear bell when hiking any distance.

Every climbing situation is unique, and each dog has a different set of abilities. In general, nontechnical climbs that don't require safety equipment like harnesses, ropes or cams can be appropriate for dogs.

Be sure to wait until your dog is one year old or older to ensure her growth plates are set, and start her with simple rock hopping activities before increasing the challenges.

Keep your dog's nails short (this decreases the probability of ripping off a nail) and protect her paw pads as suggested above.

Ruffwear makes a dog harness called the Doubleback Dog Climbing Harness that distributes the dog's weight evenly over the padded belly support and provides you with handles to help lift your dog in sticky situations.

Since most dogs seem to have a knack for getting cut, scraped, poked and banged up while out in the wild, you should make it part of your routine to look for possible problems.

Always check from head to toe for ticks and foxtails, and look at the pads, eyes and nose for cuts and puncture wounds.

I hope these tips help make your next trip just a bit safer.

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