Day Hike Essentials Checklist

A simple, print-and-pack list for beginners. Check it off before you leave the car.

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Before you go: Tell someone your plan: where you're going, your route, and when you expect to be back. Check the weather and trail conditions, and look up the rules for the park or forest you're visiting (hours, permits, fire and pet rules) on the land agency's own website.

Navigation

- [ ] Paper map of the area
- [ ] Compass (and know the basics)
- [ ] Phone with offline map downloaded*
- [ ] Route written down / shared

Water & Food

- [ ] Enough water for the whole hike, plus extra
- [ ] Water treatment if refilling on trail
- [ ] Snacks you'll actually eat
- [ ] An extra snack, just in case

Layers

- [ ] Moisture-wicking base layer (skip cotton)
- [ ] Warm layer (fleece or puffy)
- [ ] Rain jacket / wind shell
- [ ] Hat and light gloves
- [ ] Extra pair of socks

Sun Protection

- [ ] Sunscreen
- [ ] Sunglasses
- [ ] Sun hat or cap
- [ ] Lip balm with SPF

First Aid

- [ ] Basic first aid kit
- [ ] Blister care (tape or moleskin)
- [ ] Any personal medications
- [ ] Hand sanitizer

Light

- [ ] Headlamp or flashlight
- [ ] Extra batteries or charged power bank

Emergency & Tools

- [ ] Whistle
- [ ] Emergency blanket or bivy (shelter)
- [ ] Fire starter (where fires are allowed)
- [ ] Knife or multi-tool, repair tape
- [ ] Fully charged phone

Pack & Extras

- [ ] Daypack that fits it all
- [ ] Trash bag to pack out waste
- [ ] Trowel & TP bag (if needed)
- [ ] ID and a little cash

Leave No Trace on the trail

- [ ] Plan ahead and prepare
- [ ] Stay on durable surfaces / the trail
- [ ] Pack out all trash, even food scraps
- [ ] Leave what you find
- [ ] Minimize campfire impacts
- [ ] Respect wildlife (watch from a distance)
- [ ] Be considerate of other visitors

Based on the NPS Ten Essentials (nps.gov/articles/10essentials.htm) and the Leave No Trace Seven Principles: https://lnt.org/why/7-principles/.
*Free map apps exist; features change, so check before you rely on one, and always carry paper backup.

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