



Get in Shape Stay in Shape



It's important for hiking, and especially backpacking, that you have strong lower back, upper back, and abdominal muscles, in addition to strong legs. Find exercises that strengthen those muscles. A bicycle is an excellent place to start. Lifting weights and jogging is also appropriate and very helpful. The only activity that really keeps you in shape for backpacking on a trail is hiking. Below are some suggestions for getting in shape, staying in shape, and staying healthy:

- **Know your physical condition.** Know as much as possible about your current condition before you even start an exercise program (if you are not already one). That knowledge will also minimize potential problems in the backcountry. If you have a health condition, of any consequence, understand the implications and consequences of strenuous exercise and venturing into the backcountry, beforehand. Scouts and the adult leaders will need a Class III physical to participate on a high adventure trip involving hiking in the backcountry. A medical check-up is a good way to find out if you have anything to be concerned about. The backcountry is not the place for medical emergencies. There is no 911 out there!
- **Already in Shape?** If you exercise regularly, you may already be in good enough shape to tackle day hikes over easy to moderate terrain. However, walking on pavement is not the same as carrying a pack over a rough trail tread. A good suggestion is to put on a pack loaded with five more pounds than you would be carrying on your hike, then truck around the neighborhood for a few miles to see how it feels. Next, plan a short hike to see how you fare on a trail with the pack on. Gradually, in addition to your regular exercise program, take more difficult hikes that keep challenging you as well as increasing your level of conditioning and endurance. This method is the least painful because it leverages off of what you already have and gets you on the trail immediately. What could be better than hiking yourself into hiking condition?
- **Not in Shape?** If you're not in good physical condition, you should take the time to set up a regular exercise program. It must be consistent and it must be a priority (or, guaranteed, you will not be consistent and you'll always be on the brink of getting in shape -- but not quite). Just start somewhere. Swimming, biking (human powered), weight lifting, walking, or jogging. It's good to have a variety of activities that exercise a variety of muscles. Start a program you're comfortable with and stick to it on a consistent basis.
- **Anticipate level of difficulty, and train accordingly.** You will put yourself and your fellow packers at risk, if you think you can wait until the trip and then get in shape on the trail. Get in shape to carry your anticipated weight before the trip. Several weeks before a trip, anticipate how much weight you will be carrying, then prepare a pack that weighs about the same. That, then, should become your training pack for the next several weeks – about four or five nights a week – right up to two or three days before the trip. In addition, continue with your normal exercising routine. Doing this should allow you the confidence that you will be successful on the trail and that your fellow packers can count on you to be strong and healthy.
- **Stretching is important.** Stretching muscles reduces muscle tension and allows better, more flexible movement. Prior to your daily workout, whether in the backcountry, or at home, take some time to stretch your lower back, legs, torso, neck, etc. Stretching is necessary and will help prevent soreness and injury, both on and off the trail.