

Finding Your Place on CMC's Trip Schedule: Member Guide to Hiking With the CMC

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There is a lot of material in this Guide. **Don't feel you have to read everything all at once.** But if you do review all of it plus all the linked materials, it should help you become a much more informed hiker, however you define that for you. Set your own success standard and consider adjusting it from time-to-time.

How to find upcoming hikes to suit you: Use "Find Trips" on the CMC front page to search for trips by section, by difficulty, by date, by trip leader, etc. Trips are offered all year with ski, snowshoe, and microspike hikes in the winter.

Note about when "the hike is full":

- 1) Although many hikes on the calendar say "full," sign up anyway because waitlists almost always clear.
- 2) Ask the office to add you as a member of all sections you are interested in. Some sections send emails at a regular time per month with all the upcoming trips plus hints and happenings.
- 3) Sign up at your profile for **instant notice** when a new activity is posted at the CMC calendar, narrowing down the notices to only the type you are interested in seeing.

The Medical Warning and Waiver. This Guide is prepared by CMC volunteers for CMC members. We are regular hikers just like you, not fitness experts, trainers, or doctors. We are sharing what has worked for us and other hikers we have led. *Always consult your medical provider before engaging in strenuous exercise. The CMC Membership Liability Waiver you signed when you became a member and will renew every year applies to this document and to Ascending Hikes. Review it again [here](#).*

Table of Contents

[Part 1. Introduction - Why Are We Here?:](#)

[General Hiking Observations That May Challenge Your Thinking](#)

[Part 2 Understanding Trail Demands](#)

[Chapter 1. About Trail Steepness and Defining Elevation Gain](#)

[Chapter 2. Understanding Hiking Pace: Basic Definitions](#)

[Chapter 3. What Pace Means in a CMC Hike Description](#)

[Chapter 4. Choosing Hikes Right For You Based On Estimated Pace](#)

[Chapter 5. Group Safety is Everyone's Concern and Will Make You a Better Hiker](#)

[Part 3 Understanding Adjustments You Can Make and Techniques You Can Learn](#)

[Chapter 6. What Factors Affect Your Hiking Performance on Any Particular Day?](#)

[Chapter 7. Your Body's Natural Capabilities and Limits](#)

[Chapter 8. Movement – Your Stride, Using Arms, Using Hiking Poles](#)

[Chapter 9. Eat and Drink on the Trail to Maximize Performance](#)

[Chapter 10. Don't Be Surprised About Altitude Sickness](#)

[Chapter 11. Don't Worry About Being at the Back of the Pack](#)

Part 1 Introduction. Why Did YOU Join CMC?

When new CMC members talk about signing up for a hike, they usually say something like:

"I want to hike with people who have similar interests, because I am here to make friends."

but

"How do I know what kind of hike I should sign up for? I am afraid I will not be able to keep up!"

or

"I want a trip that really challenges me physically and mentally"

or

"I don't want to do a "forced march," I want to stop and take photos, look at wildflowers, and talk to others."

Hiking and taking classes with CMC, you can learn about hiking technique, speed, elevation, agility, balance, safety, and equipment choices. We recommend attending an optional New Member Hike and New Member Night and, especially, enrolling in CMC's foundational class: [Wilderness Trekking School](#) or — if the in-person commitment doesn't work for you — its hybrid version, [Day Hiker School](#).

Once you understand the elements of hiking and your own skill baseline better, you can work toward deciding which, if any, are most important to you and how to improve what isn't working as well as you would like. To be comfortable choosing a CMC hike, you may want over time to:

1. Learn the kind of trips your body is naturally suited to and at what type of trip you are comfortable hiking today.

2. Decide if and how you would like to improve your hiking ability, and identify where you might always struggle a bit.
3. Decide whether you willing to expand your Front Range hiking horizons –
 - a. Do you want to see different, uncrowded places you might not otherwise find on your own, to operate on different ground surfaces and at high elevation, or to experiment with different trip types ranging from rambles to scrambles?
OR
 - b. Are you at this time nervous or uncertain about the risks of going into the backcountry, even with a group?
4. Look for opportunities to hike with different trip leaders and other veteran CMC members to soak up Club “culture” and get tips on equipment, trip leader choices, and which classes to consider.
5. Learn techniques you can use to speed up your pace and stamina if desired.
6. Ask for help when “tuning up” for summer or returning to the trail after injury or travel.
7. Learn a bit about the trip planning process, map-reading, route-finding, and navigation.

General Observations About Hiking That May Challenge Your Thinking

Do you want to expand your hiking horizons? See if any of these issues and their solutions challenge your assumptions about barriers to your own personal hiking ability. Sometimes it’s just re-thinking the challenge that makes hiking improvement possible.

1. Sign up for trips in ever-increasing difficulty. Start with a hike that reflects what you believe is your current ability level and work up from there. Vary your trips over time in terms of distance hiked, elevation gain, trailhead elevation, and highest elevation reached. Each of these factors challenges the body in a different way and each requires its own strategy.
2. Working out on a treadmill, rower, stationary bike, or elliptical definitely can help your aerobic capacity, but does NOT provide the same muscle training as hiking because your legs are *not carrying your entire body weight nor carrying a loaded pack*.
3. Many members spend a lot of time on “Moderate” rated hikes before tackling “Challenging” rated trips. Expect to improve noticeably and to gain confidence as time passes but know it may take YEARS to top out at your very best hiker self.
4. Improving one’s hiking speed and stamina will, at times, ACTUALLY HURT your legs and lungs. NO WAY to improve without experiencing this. Enduring this is the normal and natural way your body learns to break through to the next level. Accept it, note the circumstances, lean into it, and notice it disappearing as you progress.

5. If you can talk while you hike, you are not going as fast as you are able. People concentrating on hiking fast (for them) usually don't have enough breath to talk much. Conversation also distracts you from concentrating on your technique. If you truly want to improve your hiking, focus on that for a good part of the hike and politely decline long conversations. Another reason to hike quietly: Studies show that even quiet hiker conversation has significantly negative impacts on wildlife.
 6. If you enjoy trips where people chit-chat, stop frequently for pictures to look at flowers, etc., then choose casually-paced hikes for that purpose. It's ok to do different kinds of trips on different days so long as you join any trip with realistic expectations in sync with the trip leader's described goal. Fast hikers often sign up for more casual trips as "recovery hikes."
 7. Summer often is an away-travel time. If you find yourself at a significantly lower elevation for a while, expect to take two or three hiking trips once back in Colorado to return to where you were before you left. That's usually all it takes.
 8. If you want to improve your speed and stamina, you need to hike a trip that challenges you *at least* twice a week plus, perhaps, a shorter, easier "recovery hike." Only a few minutes available? Do a speed walk around your block or run up and down some stairs.
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Part 2 Understanding Trail Demands

Chapter 1. About Trail Steepness and Defining Elevation Gain

Adapted With Permission From Our Friends at the CMC Backpacking Section (BPX)

When first selecting hikes to join, some of us make the mistake of looking mostly at trip distance: "Hey, I walk 6 miles around my neighborhood all the time, so signing up to hike 6 miles is no problem." But elevation gain is a major factor in determining a hike's difficulty. There's a big difference between hiking 3 miles on a flat trail versus 3 miles with a 2,000' elevation gain. There are several types of elevation measurements, so it is important to understand what they mean.

Understanding Elevation Gain and Loss

Total Gain – The accumulated amount you will be "going up" during the day. For example, if you climb 1000', descend 500', and then climb back up 300', the Elevation Gain is 1,300.' This takes into consideration all the ups and downs instead of just the difference between the high and low points of the trail.

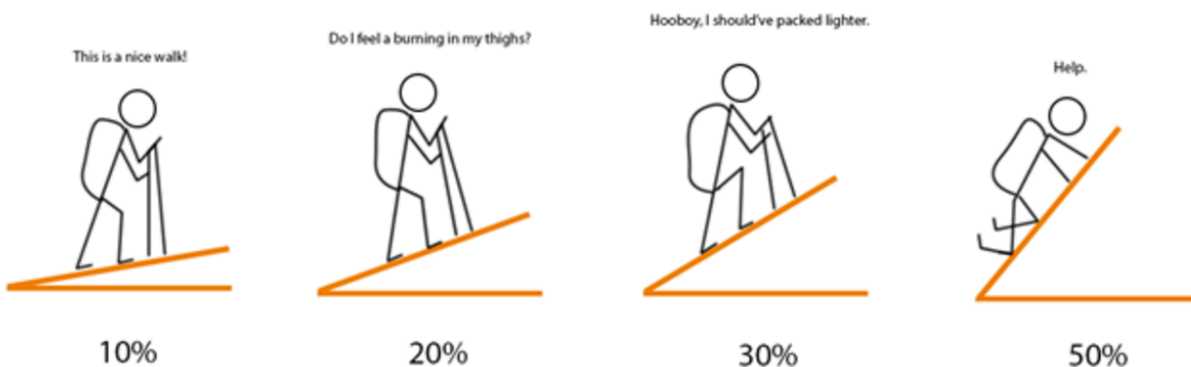
Total Loss – The accumulated amount you will be "going down" during the day. In the example above it is 500'. While we usually focus on gain, going downhill can be as tiring as uphill and put

more stress on leg muscles and joints, especially on rugged or steep trails. Also be aware of a trail that starts out going downhill first, when you are fresh, but you must hike back up at the end of the day.

How the Gain and Loss are Distributed Over the Day – How the gain/loss is accomplished — straight up and then straight back down a peak or rolling up and down over the entire course of the hike — makes a huge difference in terms of speed, body stress, and recovery.

Highest Point – This is the maximum elevation reached and could occur at any point in the day. While not as important as the total gain, the air is thinner above 7,000-8,000.' That will usually slow your pace, deplete your energy, increase your dehydration, and could cause fatigue and headache.

Grade – This measures the steepness of any point on the trail from 0°-90° where 0° is completely flat. Apps like COTREX, Gaia, and AllTrails provide elevation profiles that let you trace the grade as you proceed over the route. You can also get an idea about the grade by looking at the contour lines on a topo map. Grade gives you a much better feel for what the hike will actually be like. This picture from the [Moore Misadventures Blog: Hiking 101: The Basics of Mileage, Elevation and Routes](#) gives a fun depiction of the impact of grade.



Chapter 2. Understanding Hiking Pace: Basic definitions.

The factor least understood when selecting a trip is “**pace**” or “**average moving speed.**” Pace is *average speed while actually hiking*, **NOT** counting rest stops, lunch breaks, etc. Then there are all important terrain factors: You may be able to hike eight flat miles easily, but what happens when you must climb steadily uphill, stopping for just a few minutes every half-hour, at a speed set by someone else, at high elevation, off-trail, over boulders,, and so forth?

Here are some “moving speed” guidelines. (NOTE: the following and the CMC pace ratings are aimed at the average hiker, able to hike once or twice a week. **Young, fit hikers who hike frequently, trail runners, mountaineers, etc., usually maintain a regular hiking moving pace of 3.0 to 4.0 or even higher.**)

Trip Pace: Average Moving Speeds (mph)		
Casual	Moderate	Fast
0.5 mph to 1.4 mph	1.5 mph to 2.4 mph	2.5 mph to 4.0++ mph

In contrast, "**overall trip pace**" or "**average trip speed,**" is based upon "**total trip time,**" which includes all moving time **PLUS** stops. As an example, at the end of a hike you may have recorded an average moving pace of 2.3.mph but your overall average pace is 1.8 mph because you slowed down on hill climbs, picking your way over scree or snow, etc.

A typical CMC Moderate hike (10 miles/2000') by a typical trip leader probably maintains close to a 2.0 to 2.3 mph pace or "moving average," with minimum 5 minute stops every half hour or so for clothing adjustments (short), water/food breaks (shorter still), and bio-breaks (longer).

Lunch breaks typically are no more than 20 to 30 minutes but will be considerably shorter if the weather is poor. Uphill moving pace may be slower than average (say, 1.5 mph) and downhill faster (say, 2.5 mph) with fewer and shorter stops, but a good rule-of-thumb is to add 30 trip minutes per 1,000 feet of trip ascent. To illustrate, that typical 10-mile trip with 2000' elevation gain probably will require.....

Moving Time:	5 hours (10 miles ÷ 2.0 mph)
Uphill climb:	+ 60 minutes additional (2,000' x 30 minutes per 1,000')
Lunch:	+ 20 minutes
Stops:	+ 30-40 minutes minimum (5-10 minutes x est. 6-8 breaks during the hike)
Total time:	5 hours + 60 minutes + 20 minutes + 40 minutes, or maybe 7 hours total time trailhead to trailhead . That makes overall average speed : 1.4 to 1.5 mph (10 miles ÷ 7 hours).

Chapter 3. What Pace Means in a CMC Trip Description.

In a CMC trip description, the trip leader will give an estimated *moving* speed. Most trip descriptions list trip pace as “Moderate,” but individual leaders vary in what that means to them and the leader will set a pace that suits the leader. Every leader’s pace varies within the above ranges, meaning: “sometimes we’ll go faster (e.g., on a flat, open trail) or slower (e.g., picking our way through an off-trail boulder field).”

But it is crucial to understand the context: **pace is relative depending on the hike classification.** CMC Easy hikes are slower than Moderate hikes, which are slower than Challenging hikes, which are slower than Difficult Hikes, because typical members who sign up for these trips are naturally progressively faster. In other words, the higher the hike rating, the faster the “moderate” moving speed *and* less frequent the stops.

When everyone on a hike is fast, the hike goes fast regardless of the listed pace. But if one person can't keep up, some or all the group will slow down to accommodate that person. That's part of CMC etiquette, especially for new members just figuring out what they can do. The leader may put you in front, so others must match YOUR pace. This is preferable to frequent waiting.

By the way, a leader may set prerequisites to join a hike, such as “member must have completed WTS,” or “all participants must have climbed a 14'er in the last 90 days,” or “must obtain leader's permission to sign up,” etc. If the leader doesn't know you, the leader likely will check your CMC Profile (so make sure that is up to date) then check in with you prior to trip day, to make sure the trip is appropriate for you. This is for everyone's benefit.

Some leaders may use Slow or Slow to Moderate in place of Casual.

“Casual” is a rarely listed pace and is usually an emphatic statement by the trip leader that he or she intends to go slowly and make many stops. Nature or wildflower hikes usually designate this pace, and this perfectly proves the overall point. A flower hike's "overall trip speed" may be 0.5 mph while the leader's moving average speed or "pace" can approach 2.5 mph as the group moves from place to place, then stops for observation and commentary. In that case, the goal is to linger at many stops rather than get to a summit, viewpoint, or other destination.

Chapter 4. Choosing Hikes Right For You Based On Estimated Pace

Usually a Trip Leader will state the planned hiking pace in the trip details – read the entire page. Keeping in mind that hike distance, elevation gain, high point elevation also matter, so how do you know you can do the hike? Be sure to read the Leader Notes to see if the leader has provided any clarifying information.

Start with this: What is your own natural moving speed/mph on city streets? What about going up or down a hill? Again, let's revisit the below chart to compare your own pace with leader-estimated pace, then imagine the addition of some or all the factors listed above on pages 1 and 2.

Trip Pace: Moving Average Speeds (mph)		
Casual	Moderate	Fast

0.5 mph to 1.4 mph	1.5 mph to 2.4 mph	2.5 mph to 3.5+ mph
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So, if you think an Easy hike will be too slow, and **most new members will think so**, try a Moderate hike. Feel free to advise the leader and fellow hikers that you are a new member still figuring out your pace. No one will think the worse of you. They know that someone’s trip experience will be adversely affected if they have trouble keeping up while the group is moving. Everyone has that experience from time-to-time. So, **do not hesitate** to let the group know if you need to slow down or stop to rest. Even veteran members will “bonk” occasionally if they fail to eat or hydrate often enough.

Experienced CMC members learn what pace they typically can do on an average day, and then seek out leaders and other hikers who match that pace. How do you do that when every leader is different? On every trip, ask the people on that trip about other leaders they know who are comparable, faster, slower, more stops, fewer stops, etc. It’s a networking kind of skill.

Revealing you are new to the Club will result in an outpouring of friendly advice. That’s also the CMC way. Eventually, you will find many trip leaders whose paces and styles are just right for you.

Of course, as you hike more often, you may find yourself speeding up naturally as you gain confidence and conditioning!

Chapter 5. Group Safety is Everyone’s Concern and Can Help You Become a Better Hiker

CMC’s Trip Leaders are volunteers trained to put member safety above all other trip factors. To do that effectively, they need the entire group to participate. A Trip Leader’s favorite hikers are those who practice situational awareness: help route-find, navigate, share the trail lead, sweep at the back, listen and look out for how everyone else is doing, be prepared to assist with first aid incidents, watch surroundings for animals, wildfire smoke, and trail hazards, watch the weather, etc., etc. They never just rely on the trip leader. Paying attention in this way will make you a better hiker and a better hiking companion..

Everyone must carry their own 10 essentials and gear appropriate for the trip. This is good discipline for managing your own private adventures as well. All CMC classes have a safety component, starting with [Wilderness Trekking School](#) and its hybrid alternative [Day Hiker School](#). For new hikers or anyone new to Colorado, we recommend at the very least the one-evening [Hiker Safety Seminar](#) and its excellent CMC Press companion [Hiking Safety Handbook](#).

Many CMC hikers get in the hiker line and begin chit-chatting with friends without paying much attention to the trip's progress. The best hikers take classes that focus on [safety and survival skills](#) for the CMC activities they participate in. We recommend that every CMC member attend at some time at least one session of [Wilderness First Aid](#), [Avalanche Terrain Avoidance](#), [Wilderness Survival School](#), and [Backcountry Incident Management School](#).

Part 3 Understanding Adjustments You Can Make and Techniques You Can Learn

Chapter 6. Factors To Consider When Assessing Your Own Hiking Fitness

Factors to Be Understood and Worked On During Ascending Hikes:

- Your overall personal fitness level
- Your core strength and physical balance capabilities
- The power and length of your hiking stride
- Whether you know how to use hiking poles properly
- How you respond to certain terrain, speed, elevation, and difficult surfaces
- Stretching your presumed abilities beyond what you thought possible
- If you are consuming sufficient water and appropriate nutrition *as you hike*

Factors You Can Control:

- If you started the day well-rested or tired
- Whether you decide to carry on a long conversation during the hike (yes, it matters)
- The comfort, stability, and traction capability of your hiking boots
- The pack weight you are carrying
- The functionality of your various equipment choices
- Elimination of any “fussy” equipment or practices that requires stops or otherwise take time – a minute here and there adds up

Factors Related to the Trip You Choose:

- Whether you understand the trip description: speed, distance, etc. because this sets up your expectations
- The elevation and trail steepness at the start
- The elevation at which you will be moving throughout the day
- The speed of the leader and/or the rest of the group
- The distance to be hiked
- The steepness, length, and variation of any climbs/descents
- Whether traveling on-trail or off-trail
- The hiking surface: snow, ice, boulders, gravel, scree, talus, mud
- The thickness of the vegetation you are passing through
- How often the group stops to rest

Factors You Cannot Control (but can still work on):

- Your body's type: natural abilities, limits, and difficulties
 - Particular sensitivity to heat or cold
 - How long it takes your body's muscles to "warm up"
 - How often your body needs to refuel with food and water
 - Any medical issues that you are treating as best you can, (ex. asthma, allergies) but the effects still linger
 - How your body reacts to elevation gain and altitude on any given day
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Chapter 7. Your Body's Natural Capabilities and Limits

Are you in awe of athletes who can climb up and down all the 14'ers in a few days? Professional football, basketball, or baseball players? Someone who can climb up a cliff with ease? Or run a sub three-hour marathon? We all instinctively know that anyone can learn the basics of doing these activities, but that not everyone can aspire to play in the pros no matter how much they train for it.

Maximizing your hiking ability is a much smaller version of that. Different bodies will always excel at certain hiking skills such as hiking uphill or hiking downhill, and struggle at least a bit with others. You can strengthen your speed, strength, and stamina a lot, but you can never exceed your genetic potential, what your body can tolerate.

These sometimes subtle factors may include the age at which you started hiking (muscle memory), the age you are now, your genetic muscle make-up, your knees or hips joint health, your lung capacity, etc. If you struggle to hike up a steep hill, you may be astonished to learn that others find uphill to be relatively easy but struggle with hiking down a long steep hill. **You won't know your personal limits until you hit them repeatedly over time.** But that very effort will keep improving you. So keep trying.

Breathing. When your breathing is holding you back, try stopping for no more than 5 to 10 seconds, take a few slow **belly-deep** breaths, then start up again. Longer stops may leave you too far behind and slow down your body's attempt to acclimate to the hiking pace. Belly-deep breaths while on the move help too.

Slopes. The hike factors you'll probably encounter as most difficult are steep slopes (up or down or both) and hiking at higher elevations (ex. over 10,000'). No way to improve without practicing in actual conditions. Hiking poles can help. See below.

Posture. Posture matters even on the trail. Stand up straight, minimize leaning forward or backward, keep your chin parallel to the ground and eyes forward, relax your shoulders, and engage your core. Check in with your posture before and during your hikes until good posture

becomes a habit. You can bend slightly forward when walking up hills, but don't bend or lean too far forward. Bend from the ankles rather than from the waist to avoid lower back pain.

Watching Where You Walk. Keeping eyes looking forward may be difficult at first. We justifiably worry about taking a wrong step on rocky ground, which leads to keeping eyes looking straight down. This is bad for the neck. All those school years walking in a line have us naturally sticking very close to the person in front of us, even though we should give them more space to stumble, stop unexpectedly, carry their poles, etc. Conveniently, you can accomplish two good things at once by dropping back to keep at least six to ten feet between you and the next hiker. This allows your eyes and brain to assess the ground you will cover ahead without craning your neck.

Starting out too fast. A more subtle difficulty factor is hiking too fast right from the trailhead and/or, starting immediately up or down a steep climb. People in any group inevitably have different muscle “warm-up” needs even on an easy, flat surface: a few hundred yards, a quarter-mile, etc. Everyone on the trip understands that. And they’ve all had the experience.

Chapter 8. Your Hiking Stride and Hiking Poles

If you think of yourself as a “slow” hiker, try adjusting your natural stride over time and swinging your arms strongly in opposition to your legs.

Striding out – Legs – Many of us need to restore our stride to its natural length. Some of us have developed an unconscious walking style that doesn’t reflect our hiking speed potential. After all, other than hiking or competitive running, where do we even think about speed? We might shuffle, take shorter steps, stop and start, especially if we work in an office or clinic, walk on busy sidewalks, help children or elders walk, etc. If you focus on swinging your legs forward *from the middle or back of the hip* with no other objective than covering ground, you may be surprised at how fast you can walk. It may feel unnatural at first but keep practicing until you develop some muscle memory.

Striding out – Hips – Many of us move our legs out from the front, from the groin, and keep our hips relatively motionless and squared forward. To increase speed, your hips should rotate a bit with each stride front-to-back, not side-to-side. This will happen naturally if you mentally move your legs from the back of the hips. The movement should be subtle but will help move the leg forward. Avoid overemphasizing the hip motion at first—it will come naturally as you develop your walking stride.

Striding out – Arms – We are used to carrying bags, briefcases, keys, etc. so we don’t think about swinging our arms strongly, forward and backward. Bend your elbows at 90 degrees and swing straight forward with conviction. It's all related: If you work on restoring your leg stride and swinging your arms forward, opposite arm to leg, it will necessarily involve swinging your hips forward just a bit, each in turn. And your stride will lengthen, meaning you will cover more

ground using less energy. If you develop a steady rhythm, you'll find it feels like you have an "overdrive" gear.

Use hiking poles -- Learn to use hiking poles as a speed aid by planting them far in front of you, one at a time, as part of your natural arm-swinging during a fast walk. The poles should be an extension of the arm-to-opposite-leg movement. Pull yourself along with your arms as you move forward. Many hikers use the pole straps (hands in from the bottom) to help carry their weight on their wrists. This is especially effective during an uphill climb.

Some hikers adjust pole height for up or down slopes but that's what a long, textured pole handle is for – to switch your position as needed without stopping to adjust the poles. Part of "speed" involves less stopping, less fussiness. Hiking pole techniques make a difference, and most experienced hikers can show you in just a few minutes.

Chapter 9 – Eat and Drink on the Trail

Most hikers do not understand that **frequent** eating and drinking on the fly is essential to keep from "bonking," a term used by hikers, runners, cyclists, and other athletes to describe a condition where your muscles run out of fuel. Essentially, it's when you've "hit the wall" and depleted your body's glycogen (or energy). As a result, you can't keep going and must stop for **at least** 10-15 minutes while you eat and drink. Don't let this happen to you!

Learn to recognize the signs of your body starting to bonk. This takes self-awareness and practice. If you pay attention, you will feel this coming on long before it becomes an issue. You may need to stop talking to others a bit, if that's your habit. The moment you feel your body starting to fight the pace, **even a little bit**, eat carbs and drink some water immediately. Wash nibbling food down *every time* with lots of water.

Drinking often is essential to keep you from bonking. Carry at least part of your water in a bladder system so you can drink on the fly. Stopping to drink water from a bottle, plus having to involve another hiker to lift it in and out of your pack, slows down everyone. If you are concerned about cleanliness or maintenance, talk to a bladder user.

When it's your legs holding you back, eat sugar and electrolytes, and drink water. It usually takes about ten minutes to feel the effect kicking in and you can keep moving, assuming you didn't wait too long.

Some people need more energy food along the way than others. If you have a frequent need to refuel, consider having a readily available "feedbag" you can dip into on the fly. Again, part of "speed" involves less stopping, less fussiness. Some use a big pants pocket or hang a bottle bag off their pack waistband. This will prevent you from having to stop so often **and** more likely to encourage you to eat. Eating a mix of carbs, fat, and protein will make it less likely you will get sick from a carb overdose. If too much sugar upsets your stomach, try mixing in other items:

protein like jerky or nuts and even lightly caffeinated items such chocolate-covered espresso beans.

Be sure to mix in quick electrolytes such as chewable Salt Sticks. Other popular brands, which require dissolving so some hikers pre-prepare them in a separate carry-bottle, are Nuun Tablets and hydration powders such as LMNT, Liquid IV, Gatorade, and Emergen-C. These differ in sugar content and flavor. Everyone has a personal preference.

Chapter 10. Learn to Recognize Altitude Sickness Symptoms.

Once you start climbing even low peaks, the biggest risk you may face is altitude sickness (nausea, diarrhea, dizziness), especially if you don't drink LOTS of water and/or don't nibble a mix of sugar/salt/protein/fat constantly and/or if you try to hike faster than is tolerable for your body, in order to keep up with other hikers.

This happens to *everyone* from time to time, even experienced hikers. So start low at first, climbing to 9,000' or 10,000,' and then keep doing that week to week, maybe 1000' higher every time, to build up your tolerance. Give the leader a heads up, that you are in the process of building up your altitude tolerance.

To put it a different way, don't fall victim to 14'er fever! Most 14'ers in the front range are overcrowded and hikers who try a 14'er without proper altitude training can run into big problems, sometimes requiring rescue. Many long-time CMC members who regularly hike peaks can recount tales of rescuing a tourist on a 14'er trail. Try some 10'ers, 11'ers and 12'ers first, then 13'ers. Those are usually uncrowded and can be plenty difficult. Search [AllTrails.com](https://www.alltrails.com) for info or check out [14'ers.com](https://www.14ers.com), which also lists 13'ers, and [Climb13ers.com](https://www.climb13ers.com).

Chapter 11. Do Not Worry About Being in the Back, and What Happens if You Fall Further Behind and Can't Recover.

For some new hikers, it is tough to stay at the back of the hiking group. However, you may be the only one who cares that you are in the back or knows why. Some people go to the back just to avoid hearing others' conversations. A sweep takes on that position voluntarily and knows the sweep's job is to encourage and stay back with a person who needs a break. Just focus on having fun and remembering why you're out hiking. Maybe next time you will choose a hike with a slower pace OR you can resolve to work on speeding up just a little bit every chance you get.

Do not fall into the frequent mindset that you have "one comfortable speed" and you have no choice but to stick with that. Instead, you can "catch up" with the group from time to time *and*

do a little “interval training” (a conditioning technique to increase speed) by accelerating your pace or even jogging a bit on flat ground and downhill slopes. Believe it or not, moving quickly for a minute or even for 20 or 30 seconds during a hike will help you increase your “comfortable speed.”

If you feel you are being stretched way beyond your limit from the get-go, **it is acceptable to ask the trip leader to slow the pace or to drop back to a pace comfortable for you, letting the sweep know.** If you push yourself too hard right up front, you may never recover enough to enjoy the rest of the hike. No one wants that for you, including the trip leader and your fellow hikers.

Caution: If things go really south for you, it may be considered by the group to be similar to a minor injury. In that case the group will be willing to help carry your pack or its contents, put you in front of the line to let you set the pace, etc., to keep you with them. It is easier to follow a slower hiker than to wait every so often for someone to catch up. In some cases the entire group will turn around. In extreme cases, it may be OK to sign yourself out of a trip and return to the TH, but the leader will be reluctant to let you do this unless someone else accompanies you. Often, someone is willing to do that. This is a rare occurrence and should not be used lightly.

Additional Resources

[These Exercises Will Help You Increase Hiking Stamina](#)

[Trail Etiquette and Related Suggestions](#)

[How to Walk Faster](#)

[Improve Your Walking Posture](#)

[How to Speed Walk](#)

[Stretching & Flexibility](#)

[Flexibility Hints](#)

[CMC Backpacking Section’s Discussion on Elevation](#)

[Hiking 101: The Basics of Mileage, Elevation and Routes](#)

[CMC Recorded Trainings](#) CMC volunteers have created some excellent videos on navigation apps (Gaia, COTrex, AllTrails, Caltopo), personal locator beacons (PLB), nutrition, what to put in your pack etc. Some of these classes were ‘Quick Start Schools’ so will start with the acronym QSS. The nav lectures may be slightly outdated but the principles are still sound.

Go from...

Why would anyone want to do THAT? to...

Who would want to do THAT? to...

I could never do that! to...

I’d like to do that but ...

*I learned so much in my CMC Classes and practicing with various trip leaders. Now I **want** to do that and I **can** do that.*