

Hiking with Kids in Arizona

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As Arizonans, we love to hit the trails and enjoy the beauty of our desert environment. Hiking with our kids is a fun way to spend time and get outside, but it is critical to be well prepared so you can make the hike enjoyable and safe for your children before you go. As experienced hikers, here are some things we have learned firsthand that can help make your hike a good one for both you and your little ones.

Water, Water, Water

This is the most important rule for all hikers, especially in the desert. Realize that even the higher elevations and tall pines in Arizona are still in the desert, which means the climate is very dry. Experts recommend drinking one gallon of water per person per day. When we hike, we fill our water packs to the top, no matter how far we're going, and we refill at every water station.

Fuel Up the Little Bodies

Pickles and peanut butter. An odd combination to be sure, but this is one do-it-yourself suggestion that we received from a local hiking expert in Prescott. When we asked what kinds of food to give our then six-year-old on a 2 or 3 mile day hike to keep up her energy, he said you don't always need to buy pre-packaged solutions. Our daughter is tall and lean, so she has very few fat reserves to keep her moving during what most adults may consider a short hike. She goes from full steam to "carry me" in about 2 minutes flat. The trick is to make sure she eats plenty of small snacks along the way.

There are some great pre-packaged "power bars" out there that work well, but the pickles and peanut butter recommendation is a great idea, too. Pickles provide quick-acting electrolytes, which regulate nerve and muscle function and hydration, and peanut butter provides a good source of healthy monounsaturated fat and protein. We tried this weird-sounding combination in our own taste-test and liked it! It tastes a little like the peanutty sauces used in a lot of Thai food. Not too bad.

Everyone Carries Their Own Pack (Unless the Child is the Pack)

This is a good rule for everyone to follow for all hiking and backpacking trips. Don't let one person carry all the food, water or supplies, even if they are the "strongest" person, or the most knowledgeable. You never know when an accident will happen to you or someone else, so it's best for everyone to be prepared to take care of themselves, at least until help arrives. This applies to kids, too, to a certain degree. We have our daughter carry her own water pack (an absolute must) so she can drink as she needs it. The pack includes her own snacks, sunscreen, lip balm, and small first aid kit. You don't need to carry a lot, but be sure to have the basics on hand for each person on your hiking adventure.

Wear The Right Gear

This is important advice for the happiness and comfort of everyone in your hiking party. There are shirts, pants, shoes and socks made specifically for hiking and other outdoor activities. I highly recommend you use them! You don't have to spend a fortune on new clothes (there are many discount versions available and most stores have frequent sales), but our experience has taught us that you will be miserable if your gear is not up to the task.

Specifically, do not wear jeans. Ever. They are heavy and chafing, and just a bad idea all around for hiking. A good pair of hiking pants or lightweight exercise pants that will withstand movement are worth every penny. Wear clothing that is made to breathe, wick away sweat, dry quickly and be comfortable. And be careful with your footwear. Hiking shoes are made to be comfortable while tackling tough, rugged terrain. This is important for both adult feet and little growing feet. Don't spend a fortune (your kids will grow out of their gear quickly, anyway) but look for sales and check online for discounts. Hand-me-downs and gently used gear are also great options.

Pace Yourself and Be Prepared to Stop Frequently

Kids not only have short attention spans and small bladders, they also wear out quickly. Make the hike fun for your youngsters by making stops along the path. Look for wildlife, tell your kids about special plants and flowers, find big sticks and funny rocks. Here in the Sonoran Desert, look for weird and funny cactus shapes, petroglyphs on rocks, and guess what kind of animal (or insect!) lives in the holes you find along the trail.

Take a breath and smell the desert air. It's like no other scent in the world and one of the best things about hiking in Arizona. And be prepared for possible potty breaks along the trail. Have everyone go before you leave, but don't be surprised if you need to have a quick lesson about squatting behind a tree or bush (and we highly recommend taking plenty of tissues and wet wipes, just in case)!

Last, But Not Least - Have Fun!

Your kid is only this age once. Take time to appreciate who they are and what they can do right now. Check out [Ladybug's Blog](#) or more information on hiking and ideas for fun things to do and places to go in Arizona. Have a great time and get your kids outdoors!

