



## HOW TO BUY A BACKPACK

### Introduction

Almost any backpack will carry your stuff. The trick is to find one that's comfortable, durable, versatile and convenient.

### Instructions

#### Step One

Define the primary use of your pack. Any one pack is unlikely to be ideal for both short day trips to the beach and carrying all your gear on an overnight camping trip.

#### Step Two

Look at various sizes. Packs are rated by capacity with internal volume in cubic inches. Small packs, called day-packs, are 1,000 to 2,000 cubic inches. Medium packs are 2,000 to 4,000 cubic inches. Large packs are 4,000 cubic inches and more.

#### Step Three

Examine pack construction. The simplest packs consist of a nylon bag with straps--fine for short hikes and light loads. Select better-built packs for backpacking and serious use. The pack should have dense padding anywhere the pack touches your body, including the straps, the waist belt and along your back. Make sure the straps are securely sewn to the bag and bartacked.

#### Step Four

Try on the pack. The thick part of the shoulder straps should rest on top of your shoulders. The waist belt, if any, should rest on top of your hip bones. If possible, place a load in the pack while testing. Medium and large packs often have a mechanism for torso length; make sure it is adjusted properly.

#### Step Five

Examine the pack's other features. Is the material sturdy and rip-resistant? Are the zippers durable? Is it water-repellent? Are the outside pockets easy to access and large enough for your needs? Is there a pocket for a water container? If the pack is for winter use, can it carry skis, ice axes or snowshoes? Packs that consist of one compartment without many pockets carry large gear well, but fishing around for small items can be annoying.

#### Step Six

Understand the frame structure, if any. Large packs used to incorporate an external metal frame to support the load. Most now have a smaller, internal frame, allowing greater freedom of movement and easier maneuvering in tight places. Some people prefer the additional support of an external frame.

#### Step Seven

Test-drive a pack specifically created for the legions of female backcountry enthusiasts. Frames are designed to fit shorter torsos; hip belts are anatomically constructed to effectively transfer weight without crushing the hip bones; shoulder harnesses and sternum straps fit womens bodies more comfortably. Shop sites such as OspreyPacks.com, SierraDesigns.com and TheNorthFace.com.

#### Step Eight

Consider costs. Simple nylon packs can be had for \$30 or \$40. A high-quality daypack costs between \$50 and \$150. A medium-size pack, suitable for backpacking and technical climbing, costs \$100 to \$300. Large packs range from \$150 to \$500.