

Fitting and Packing a Rucksack

Ensuring proper fit is the most important step when you select a pack. It's hard to enjoy your expedition if your pack leaves you hunched over or racked in pain. Pack size and suspension systems are the key considerations in fitting a backpack. As with boots, proper fit is important with a backpack. The weight of a pack is secondary, since a well-designed, heavier backpack may give you a more comfort than a much lighter pack carrying the same load. Although weight may be secondary, it is nonetheless very important.

Know your torso length.

Lack of this knowledge often causes an uncomfortable realization, after the fact, that the pack doesn't fit correctly. The reason you must measure your torso, rather than guess what size pack you should have, based on your ability or size, can be illustrated as follows: a large, tall person can have a short torso (and long legs) thus requiring a smaller pack. A shorter, smaller person can have a longer torso (and shorter legs) and require a larger pack. All pack makers design their packs with your torso in mind. Thus, measure your torso, preferably before purchasing.

To determine your torso size, measure along your back from the seventh vertebrae - the largest bump on the back of your neck, with your head forward--to a point on your lower back which is horizontal with the top of your hipbones. If you find that your torso is on the border between two sizes, go with the larger size. The hip belt should wrap around your hips, not your waist (or stomach) and the lumbar pad should be centered properly into your lumbar area. You want a significant amount of the pack's weight on your hips. A good way to do that is to make sure your hipbone is centered under your belt (and the lumbar pad centered and pressing firmly into your lower back). Get a shoulder harness that doesn't get in the way when you swing your arms or have buckles that pinch your skin.

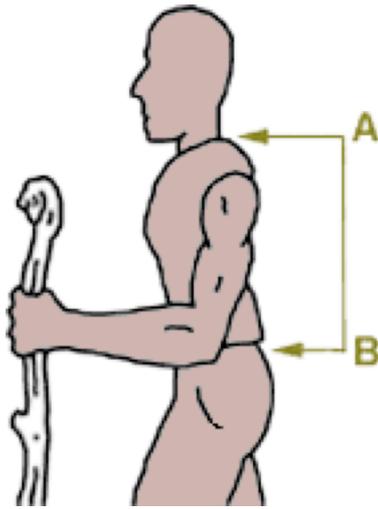
Adjusting your pack

Wearing a loaded pack should feel as though your body has become somewhat heavier, not as though you're shouldering a sumo wrestler. If the suspension system is doing what its supposed to, most of the packs weight will be comfortably transferred to your hips.

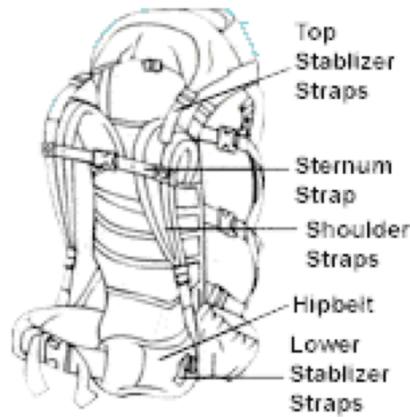
First, loosen the straps on the packs harness, then try it out:

- Load the pack up with 10 to 15 kg (22 to 33lb).
- Put the pack on, bend forward and place the hip belt directly over your hip bones, fasten the buckle, and tighten the hip belt. The padding should wrap right around your hip bones.
- Pull in the shoulder straps. They should be far enough apart that they don't squeeze your neck. The strap ends should be no more than 10 cm (4 inches) from your armpits.
- Adjust the top stabilizer straps to a comfortable position, about a 45-degree angle
- Fasten the chest strap and adjust the lower stabilizing straps until comfortable

Finally, walk around and play with the adjustments to fine-tune the fit. A pack that fits correctly should feel like an extension of your own body. Remember that if the pack doesn't feel right now, it certainly won't feel right after hours on the trail.



Suspension System



Packing your Rucksack

Ideally, rucksack weight, including 2 litres of water (weights 2 kilograms) should not exceed 1/4 of your body weight
 Consider items you may need quickly throughout the day and pack these accessibly, in the top or side pockets

- waterproofs,
- water,
- daily snack food,
- head torch,
- map and compass,
- hat and gloves
- personal medical kit

Your tent should also be accessible for when you reach camp, pack it down one side inside your rucksack.
 Sleeping bag and thermarest which you will only need when you have set up camp go at the bottom.
 Spare clothes, food for that evening's meal, stove and fuel, expedition food, washing up kit go in the middle

It is very important to waterproof your rucksack with a liner and also put items into smaller dry sacks within this liner
 Pack heavier items higher up in the pack, and lighter items lower down

Make sure all items that are important to stay dry and intact are packed inside your rucksack

Ideally the only things packed outside will be your water bottles and roll mat.