

HIKING

FOR THE
CouchPotato™

A Guide for the Exercise-Challenged

Shelley Gillespie

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Hiking for the Couch Potato: A Guide for the Exercise-Challenged

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The author, Venture Court Productions, and For the Couch Potato™ assume no liability for accidents happening to, or injuries sustained by, readers who engage in the activities described in this book.

*Dedicated to Roger, the inspiration and
motivation for the Couch Potato becoming a
hiker and this book becoming a reality.*

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PREFACE

Hiking for the Couch Potato

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a person who preferred to read, curled up on the sofa with a good—or not-so-good—book. Due to a cold climate, a child to raise, an exhausting job, and other reasons and excuses, she was largely—and I do mean *largely*—sedentary.

In other words, she was a world-class sitter. The couch was molded to certain parts of her anatomy. Long evenings, and weekend hours, would be whiled away munching, reading, and stretched out on the couch. She personified the “Couch Potato”—“A person

who spends much time sitting or lying down, usually watching television.” (*Webster’s II New College Dictionary*, 1995)

Then, something changed. Actually, a lot of things changed. The kids grew up, the single person found another single person and married, and they moved to a new climate. Suddenly, it was appealing to get out and see something of nature.

Armed with a camera, water, hiking socks, boots, hiking pole, and trail guides, the Couch Potato became a hiker. Not an easy transition, at first it took a lot of prodding and positive thinking. Gradually, it got easier. Finally, the Couch Potato realized that she was a hiker who really looked forward to outdoor encounters. Like birds and bees, flowers and trees, flora and fauna, and a lot of sunshine.

The world does look better out in the sunshine. With sun block at the ready, the vitamin D you get from the sun is good for you! Although your mama may have made vegetables and other good things—like exercise—seem difficult to take, you are now an adult. The great thing about hiking is that you get to make your own decisions!

So, do something for yourself! Try it—you might like it.

—The Author

CHAPTER 1

Not an Easy Beginning

THE COUCH POTATO was not instantly enthusiastic about beginning outdoor adventures. In urban areas, she had sprained her ankle—twice—and had visions of Hansel and Gretel getting lost in the forest or other misfortunes.

Remembering earlier camping experiences didn't help, either. On a camping event as a teenager assigned to KP (kitchen patrol), she had fallen in the stream while washing dishes. Wet, soggy and traveling without a change of clothes, she was embarrassed and cold. The boys' camp was nearby and they got to see her

in her drenched state. This did not promote positive feelings about the great outdoors.



As a young girl in the scouts, she also remembered the time her troop was camped downwind from the latrine. “Fragrance” was too kind a word to describe the smell. “Stench” was perhaps more accurate. Not a pretty memory!

And, she was concerned about allergies. So, there were lots of excuses.

As she learned about hiking, one by one, her excuses went away. Fortunately, her guide was an experienced hiker who had hiked in very demanding situations and locations. The guide, better known as husband, was very matter of fact. You take precautions and prepare. You find places with well-marked trails so you don't get lost. You arrive at a place to hike. You get out and hike.

So, her fears allayed, her husband took her for a shopping excursion. Hey, shopping, who wouldn't like that as a beginning for a new adventure?

Perhaps it was shopping for the new hiking boots or poles that distracted her from how she would actually be using the purchases. (More on hiking equipment later.) Maybe it was just that the hiking trail sounded so interesting. Or, perhaps it was just that staying in the house was getting boring.

One day, the Couch Potato just went for a walk. Or so it seemed.

All of this proves that even the non-athletic among us can enjoy the brief visits to nature that hiking provides. Whether it be birds, butterflies, competitive races on a trail, or getting away from chores, hiking provides a change of place and pace for our hectic lives.



Why not just go walking? Well, that's good, too. Many studies show how important walking is to our health. For this Couch Potato, however, walking seemed less interesting than hiking. Walking seemed to imply flat surfaces and less interesting surroundings. Besides, hiking offered an excuse to put on those sharp hiking boots and grab some poles.

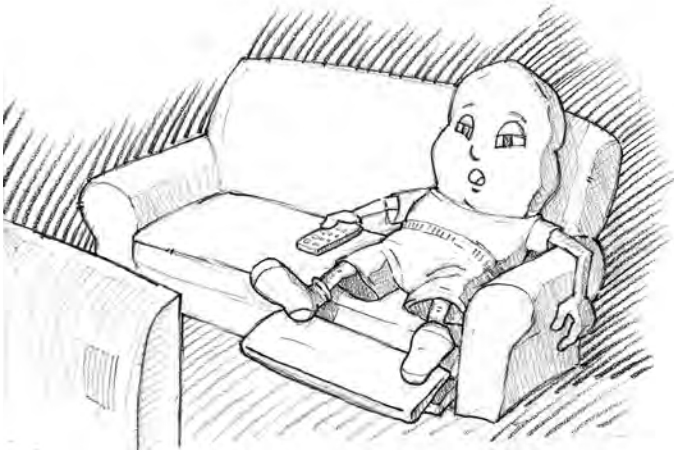
The Act of Hiking: Having "Attitude"

A hike, defined in *Webster's Dictionary* as "To go on an extended walk for pleasure or exercise," seemed an impossibility. Hike—for pleasure? These two concepts seemed mutually exclusive.

Hiking as a concept seemed *definitely* alien.

Basic exercise for most Couch Potatoes is to move the finger on the remote or, at worst, get up for a snack. Nimble fingers from working the remote are

the most agile part of the Couch Potato species. But this can change!



Why Change?

Well, there are a number of reasons to change. Being a Couch Potato can get boring. By the time you've seen the same movie on one of the extended cable channels three or more times, you are probably tired of that. If you have memorized the movie and can recite the dialogue word-for-word, you probably should audition for some theatrical pursuit. (Which would also mean getting off the couch!)

Daytime broadcasting is not all that entertaining. (Apologies to the avid fans of soap operas. Briefly, the Couch Potato was one of those fans. By the time she realized that it took a very l-o-o-o-o-ng time for anything

to *happen* on a soap, she was empowered to miss a few episodes.) Besides, that is what video recorders are for! Save your favorite episodes for an evening or rainy day.

If the spuds you've been nibbling are adhering to your middle and you have an unhealthy pallor, an outdoor excursion might be just the activity you need. More on this as you resolve to ...

Get in Shape

Although most people don't care about our country's obesity epidemic, getting in shape is another matter. You will probably live longer if you remove yourself from the couch and go outside.

Calories? Who wants to count calories? The Couch Potato didn't particularly, but the fact is that you burn almost six times as many calories by hiking than by sitting still for one hour. Even walking at a slow two miles per hour burns more than twice as many calories as just sitting. And, why do we want to burn calories?

Well, 3,500 of those ugly things make a pound. Every pound we get rid of makes most of us healthier. (We exempt the minority of people who are the ideal weight for their height.) The Couch Potato knew for her weight that she'd need to be about six feet tall to be healthy. Assuredly, she is not six feet tall, nor her ideal weight, but she is healthier since she took up hiking. And after hiking, no, she does not indulge in an apple pie orgy, tempting as that may be, to reward

herself for hiking. That would cancel out the calories she burned in a one-hour hike. (See Appendix II for URL for calorie burning activities chart.)

There are no guarantees in life, but hiking is one way to get healthier. Plus, we can visit the **Great Outdoors**.

But, frankly, is it really the *Great* Outdoors?

Well, it depends. If you go walking with car fumes and busy traffic to accompany you, then, no, the outdoors isn't so great. However, a quiet hike on a trail with the prospect of seeing a memorable view or a small creature is far superior.

Views vary, depending on where you hike. So, there are no assurances about picturesque views.

However, there are other compensations.



Clothes, for example. You can enjoy the clothes that are practical for hiking. Since hikers don't have a "uniform" the way people who participate in organized sports do, the new hiker should choose clothes that make hiking fun and have lots of pockets to store "indispensable" items. Getting a "look" for your hiking excursion can definitely provide an excuse to hit the stores. Shopping is a great transition from being a Couch Potato to being a hiker.

When you hike, you make it possible for clothes to fit better. You might even drop a size! Exercise—who wants to exercise? But, movement is everything! If you are out seeing the world and moving about, you are getting exercise.

If those exercise tapes from Leslie, Jackie, Jillian and the various other svelte lovelies were at all entertaining and didn't actually require coordination, the Couch Potato might not have joined the ranks of hikers. When you try exercising at home alone, there is no possibility that you can live up to the image you see on the video. Besides, how many of us actually have the room required to move about and do all of the gyrations shown on videos? The Couch Potato was always bumping into things and having to watch out for furniture. She was never going to show her face in a gymnastics class!

While hiking, you usually see people in all states of fitness. This is certainly less intimidating than the

gorgeously coiffed, forever-youthful exercise gurus who never even seem to sweat. Plus, you don't need to memorize routines or count "reps." The Couch Potato could never keep track of the routines and felt entirely inept. What she could do was put one foot in front of another. That's hiking—or walking, if you prefer.

So, get up! That is the start. Since everything has to begin somewhere, getting up is about right as a first step. The hardest hike you'll ever take is out the door the first time.

Everything follows.

Plus, when you return home, the couch will still be there. It will seem even more comfy by comparison, a reward for your efforts!



What You Need to Hike

Technically, you don't need much equipment to hike. But, being prepared is preferable. Now, you can do what some people do, especially with children, which is to get all dressed up and go out for a hike. Patent leather shoes and party dresses are not recommended attire for a hike. They hinder movement. Besides not being practical, formal dress is not the easiest way to greet nature. Showing off the latest name-brand fashion



accessories is also not essential. Nor is the birthday suit. That leads to sunburn and lots of bug bites. So, somewhere in the middle is a happy alternative.

So, what *should* you wear to the great outdoor encounter? Comfortable clothes that cover surfaces to protect from the elements are a good idea. Along those lines, sunscreen is also another good investment. A hat, sunglasses, hiking boots, and a few other items, which we'll discuss in the next chapter, are the first items you'll need.

