

How to Pack Your Backpack

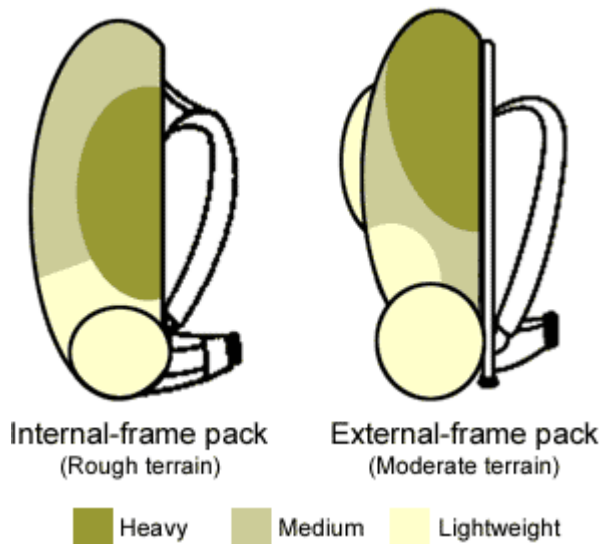
You've planned, shopped and prepared. Now it's time to load up and head out. What's the smartest way to get all that gear into your backpack?

It depends on what you're carrying (internal-frame pack or external?) and where you're going (on-trail or off-trail?).

QUICK READ

1. Whether you're traveling on- or off-trail, keep your heaviest items close to your back, centered between your shoulder blades. This holds true for internal- and external-frame packs.
2. Pack heavy items near the top of your pack for on-trail travel, to center the weight over your hips.
3. Pack heavy items near the bottom of your pack for uneven terrain or cross-country travel. This keeps your center of gravity low for better balance.
4. Keep often-used items such as sunscreen, snacks, map and compass where you can get to them easily.

Distributing Pack Weight



Internal-Frame Packs

- Whether you're traveling on- or off-trail, keep your **heaviest items close to your back**, centered between your shoulder blades.
- For **on-trail** travel, keep heavy items **higher** inside your pack. This helps focus more of the weight over your hips, the area of your body best equipped to carry a heavy load.
- For **off-trail** exploration, reverse the strategy. Arrange heavier items **lower** in the main compartment, starting again from the spot between your shoulder blades. This lowers your center of gravity and increases your stability on uneven terrain.
- Stuff your **sleeping bag** into its lower compartment first. Squeeze in any additional lightweight items you won't need until bedtime (pillowcase, sleeping shirt, but nothing aromatic). This will serve as

the base of the main compartment, which you'll fill next.

- **Tighten** all compression straps to limit any load-shifting.

External-Frame Packs

- As with an internal, keep your **heaviest items close to your back**, near your shoulder blades.
- Externals are recommended for **on-trail travel only**. Load heavier items **high** inside your pack and close to your body. Doing so centers the pack's weight over your hips and helps you walk in a more upright position.
- Pack your **sleeping bag** in its stuff sack. Finish loading your main packbag, then strap the bag to the lash points on the bottom of the packbag. If rain seems likely, consider stuffing your sleeping bag inside a second stuff sack or wrapping it in plastic.

Tips for Either Pack Style

- **Women** and people of short stature often find they prefer to pack the weight low whether they're traveling on- or off-trail, regardless of which pack style they're carrying. You are the ultimate judge of what feels comfortable to you. Experiment with different load arrangements to determine what feels best.
- Make sure some items are **easily accessible**, packed in places where they can be reached with a minimum of digging:

Map	Compass
Sunglasses	Insect repellent
Snack food	Flashlight/headlamp
First-aid supplies	Water bottles
Rainwear	Packcover

- Don't waste empty space. **Cram every nook** with something. Put a small item of clothing inside your pots, for example. Smaller items, such as food, pack more efficiently in individual units rather than when stored loosely inside a stuff sack.
- If you are part of a group, **split up** the weight of large items (a tent, for instance) with other group members. Don't make 1 person become an involuntary packhorse.
- **Cluster** related small items (such as utensils and kitchen items) in **color-coded stuff sacks** to help you spot them easily.
- Minimize the number of items you **strap to the outside** of your pack. Gear carried externally may adversely affect your balance. Secure any equipment you carry outside so it doesn't swing or rattle.

Tips: How about **long tent poles**, for example?
Stow them horizontally with your sleeping pad across the top of an external pack; with an internal, carry

them vertically, secured behind the compression straps on one side of the pack with the ends tucked into a "wand pocket" at the pack's bottom. A **daisy chain** and **ice axe loops** are designed for specific mountaineering gear; feel free to improvise with them, but don't get so creative that you jeopardize your comfort or stability.

- Make sure the cap on your **fuel bottle** is screwed on tightly. Position it below your food inside your pack in case of a spill.
- Carry a **packcover**. Backpacks, though made with waterproof fabric, have vulnerable seams and zippers. After a few hours of exposure to persistent rain, the items inside your pack could become wet—and thus much heavier.
- **Quick repair tips:** Wrap strips of duct tape around your water bottles; in case a strap pops or some other disaster occurs, a quick fix could keep you going. Take along a few safety pins in case a zipper fails.