How to buy a pack

Purchasing the right pack is very important. Having a poorly fitting pack will add discomfort to your day hike or backpacking adventure. Equally important is to the right pack for right adventure. It is pretty hard to go on a backpacking trip which requires carrying a lot of gear & food using a small daypack. An Alpine Pack may work Day Hikes or short backpack trips. Before you shop for a pack, know what types of trips you will be taking. There are a lot of options out there. Local shops and larger outfitters such as Mountain Equipment Coop have a decent level of inventory and knowledgeable people on staff to assist you with your purchase.

Types of Backpacks

Packs are designed to accommodate different body types, activities, and outdoor conditions.

a) Daypacks (15 - 35L)

Daypacks are small with little if no internal frame to support loads. Weight is supported by the shoulder straps. Some higher end Daypacks have a waistbelt to center the weight and padding for additional comfort.

b) Alpine Packs (35 - 55L)

Alpine Packs are medium-sized with some internal frame and a more substantial waistbelt or hipbelts that helps carry the load. As this type of pack is slightly larger than a daypack it can be used for longer more extensive day hikes. Depending on the Alpine Pack and the type of sleeping gear you are carrying, this pack may or may not be suitable for overnight excursions.

c) Backpacking Packs (55 - 75L)

Backpack Packs are for multi-day trips. These packs have structural rigidity and a substantial hipbelts which transfers the load from your back and shoulders to your hips.

d) Expedition Packs (75 - 120L)

Expedition Packs are the travel trunks for extended backpacking and full expedition's trios. Winter backcountry travelers use these packs for the extra gear they need.

Design: Front or Top Loading

Front loading: Allows easy access to your gear. Look for strong Zippers on the panels as the poor quality packs & zippers may let in rain and snow. The better quality packs use compression straps which take the pressure off zippers.

Top-loading packs: Top load packs are stronger than front-loading packs. Top load are more inconvenient as you may have to unpacked most of your gear to reach something at the bottom. Top Loaders are more popular in the backcountry as they are designed to carry more gear and they are more durable.

Fitting

Before you head out on you trek, make sure your pack fits properly. When you think your pack is fitted correctly, walk around and play with the adjustments to fine-tune the fit. If fitted correctly, it should feel like a part of your body. If the fit feels lousy at home, it will be worse on the trail. Websites such as www.mec.ca click 'learn" then 'packs" then "back fitting" will help you fit your pack. p

Torso Length

Selecting the correct pack length is extremely important. If a pack is too long or too short, the hipbelt sits in the wrong place and the shoulder straps will carry the brunt of the load. Improper pack length can also make back and lumbar padding gap and bulge in the wrong places, adding to discomfort.

Packs receive a lot of abuse. If you are thinking you will be using the pack a lot look for these features:

- Durable fabrics especially in high-wear areas.
- Tightly stitched seams. To test for this, pull on the seam where the straps are sewn into the pack, it should be difficult for you to see any stitches.
- Inside seams should be bound (covered by fabric) for better durability.
- Weather-resistant urethane coatings that provide some protection from the elements
- Beefy, strong-looking zippers.
- Depending on type of hiking you are doing, make sure the Suspension Systems is up to your task;
- Look for shoulder straps with firm but forgiving padding. They should not pinch your shoulders, chafe under your armpits, or restrict your range of movement. The shoulder harness should be designed to handle 30 to 40 percent of the weight. The straps keep the pack centered and balanced to ensure the majority of the weight is transferred onto the hips.
- More expensive packs have straps with shape or contour that enhances the fit and profile of the bag. A sternum strap is also a nice feature that helps keep the shoulder straps in the correct position and prevent chaffing under the armpit.
- Hipbelts stabilizes the pack and keeps it in place. On small packs, the hipbelt's main role is to keep the pack close your back reduces shifting or bouncing; it is not intended to bear weight.
- On large packs, the hipbelt is the primary load-bearing component. It should have thick firm padding and ideally have a molded shape. The shape helps seat the pack firmly on the hips, reducing lateral movement and making the bag more comfortable. The clip on the belt should be sturdy and easy to engage, release, and adjust.
- The backpad is the part of the bag the touches your back. It is often a closed-cell foam pad covered with fabric. Larger packs may also include additional weight-supporting aluminum stays. Many smaller packs have a thin, but rigid panel built into the bag behind the cushioned backpad. The purpose of the sheet is to ensure the bag maintains its shape when partially full.
- Larger packs have a rigid back panel and one or two aluminum stays. The stays ensure good weight transfer from the shoulders and the hipbelt. Very high-end packs may have pre-curved aluminum stays that offer maximum support and fit.
- If you plan on carrying substantial weight it is crucial that the suspension system fits your back properly. The majority of high-performance packs are available in multiple sizes

Women's Backpacks

- Women's backpacks are specifically designed to accommodate subtle physiological differences such as shorter torsos and narrower shoulders. They are also built to fit more obvious differences between women and men.
- Many women need shoulder straps that are located closer together than on a man's pack. Straps that are too far apart tend to slip off the shoulders. Tightening the sternum strap may help, but it's uncomfortable when pulled too tightly.
- Standard hipbelts don't always match a woman's hips. This may cause the bottom edge to dig in while the top of the belt sits awkwardly or simply doesn't rest on the hips at all. Loosening the hipbelt to make it more comfortable will transfer the pack's weight to the shoulders. To carry loads comfortably, the hipbelt should fit snugly over your hipbones and its curvature should eliminate spots that dig in. Models with interchangeable hipbelts will allow you to find the correct size.