TRAINING FOR GRAND CANYON HIKER TRIP

Anyone who is thinking about hiking in and out of the Grand Canyon trip needs to be a physically active individual. You should be a person who exercises a minimum of 3-5 times a week.

The best way to get ready for a Grand Canyon hike is to combine cardiovascular (aerobic) exercise, strength training and hiking. Walking or slow jogging is not enough. More strenuous activity like lengthy hikes on inclines, cycling, running or swimming is required. Your best exercise is to do the real thing – hiking. Start with shorter hikes and then increase your distance and pace. Try to do your hiking on dirt trails with up and down paths. You want your ankles, knees and muscles to get used to uneven loose terrain. Working out at the gym will increase your cardiovascular fitness, but will not prepare your muscles for the irregular surfaces that you will find in the Grand Canyon. While training, it is helpful if you carry a daypack and wear the same footwear that you will be using for your Grand Canyon hike.

Before starting any exercise regimen you should consult your doctor and have a physical check-up. Enlisting the services of a personal trainer or participating in a supervised gym workout program is a great way for you to stay on track and be ready for your hike. Below are some examples of exercises to incorporate in your training routine.

**Lower Body Strength Training**

Strength training will make your hike more enjoyable and can help to prevent injury. It will enhance your balance in the leg muscles and increase coordination, which are both important for hiking. While training for your hike, don’t forget to also train your upper body. This trip requires an entire fit body. Below are some examples for strength training for your lower body.

**Squats:** Stand with feet hip or shoulder distance apart. Pull your belly button towards your spine and contract your abdominal muscles. Slowly lower your body into a squat, as if you are sitting in a chair. If you can, go down until your butt is in line with you knees (knees at 90 degree angles). If you can’t go down that low, go as low as you can without losing the natural arch of your back. Make sure your knees are behind your toes. Keeping the weights in your heels, slowly stand up without locking your knees. Repeat the movement 10-15 times, performing 1 to 3 sets. For each repetition, count to three on the way down and up to ensure that you do not go too fast. You can also hold weighs in each hand just outside the thighs or with the arms bent above the shoulders.

**Lunges:** Start with your feet shoulder width apart and toes pointing forward. Your upper body should be erect with arms down at your side. With your right foot step about 2-3 feet forward. Lower your upper body by bending until your left knee is about 3 to 4 inches from the ground and your right thigh is parallel to the floor. While bending at the right knee the left foot remains in place by shifting your weight to the left toes. The left knee should bend slightly to assist in lowering the body but should not touch the floor. Rise up and return to your starting position, with your right leg even with your left, then repeat the motion with the opposite leg. This exercise should be done slowly and completely in about three to five seconds. Lunges can also be done holding weights. Do 3 sets of 10 reps with each leg.
Step-downs
Stand on a step, stairs or bleachers facing downhill. While balancing on one foot, reach to the floor with the other foot. Try to keep your back in a neutral position and allow both knees to bend. Try not to transfer your body weight over the descending foot. Touch your heel to the floor and then return back to the start position. Use the foot and leg on the step to raise yourself back to the start position. Do 2 sets of 15 reps.

Standing Calf Raises: These can be done freestanding or on anything raised up like stairs or books. Place the ball of one foot on the edge of the raised object. Let your heel and arch extend off of the object stretching down as far as possible. For balance you may wish to hold on to a rail, wall, chair, etc. Rise up on toes as high as possible and hold for a quick second while flexing the muscle. Slowly lower to the starting position. Repeat.

1-Leg Deadlift: Stand on one leg, with the other foot hovering just above the floor behind you for balance. Squat down as low as you can toward the floor. Keep your back straight. Lift back up to the vertical standing position. Repeat. When you have completed several repetitions, switch to the other leg and repeat. These can also be done while holding dumbbells in each hand.

Ankle Strengthening: Stand on one foot with your knee slightly bent. Balance for 20-30 seconds, then switch to the other foot. Once you have become good at this, with your other leg, add 10 short kicks to the side, 10 to the front and 10 to the back. Your kicking leg should be only a few inches off the ground. Gradually increase the number of kicks, working up to 30 to the front, back and side. This exercise will help the small muscles in your ankles and feet adjust to a change in balance and momentum.

Knees, quadriceps: On one leg stand sideways on the lower step of a staircase. Your outside leg hangs off the side of the step. Slowly bend the knee you are standing on, until your other foot barely touches the floor, and then straighten back up again. Keeping a good upright posture, do the repetitions slowly. Start with two sets of 10 and increase from there. For a more intense workout use a higher step, do slower reps or increase the number of reps.

Hamstring Curl with Exercise Ball: Begin by lying flat on your back with your arms at your side and place both heels on the exercise ball. Lift your hips in the air forming a straight line with your torso. Pull the ball towards your body with your heels, squeezing your hamstrings and roll it back out without dropping your hips. Repeat for 10 reps. Increase the difficulty by doing one leg at a time.

Leg Extensions: This exercise can be performed on a weight machine or by sitting at the end of the table and using ankle weights. The pad on the machine should fall on the top of your lower leg just above your feet. Hold the bench with your hands. Make sure that your legs form a 90-degree angle between the lower and upper leg. Using you quads, extend your legs (straighten them). Pause a second on the contracted position. As you slowly lower your legs, do not allow your knees to go past the 90 degrees of bend. This will minimize knee stress. This exercise can also be done with one leg at a time.