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MOUNTAINEERING & TREKKING TRAINING

Get Expedition-Ready

3 Load-Carrying Training Strategies

Plus 5 Tips For Perfect Backpack Weight Distribution

By Kate Sielmann



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Training technique #1

Gradually Increase Your Backpack Weight

Okay, so this one seems obvious but it's a step most people skip it and go straight to their full pack weight because they skipped step #0 and end up panic load carrying a couple of weeks before their departure date.

It never ends well. You need to gradually increase the weight, giving your body (and mind) time to adapt and slowly overcome the additional weight.

Here's what I recommend you do for your Zone Two training sessions:

Start by packing your backpack with 50% of the weight you expect to carry on your expedition. For example, if you're expecting to carry 20kg/44lbs on your expedition, then start with 10kg/22lbs.

Aim to progressively increase the weight by 20% every week. For example.

Week 1: 10kg/22lbs

Week 2: 12kg/26lbs

Week 3: 14kg/30lbs

Week 4: 16kg/35lbs

Week 5: 18kg/39lbs

Week 6: 20kg/44lbs

Week 7: 20kg/44lbs

Week 8: 20kg/44lbs

Hey, not sure what a Zone Two session is? Check out this Instagram Reel where I explain everything you need to know about Zone Two training. (<https://www.instagram.com/p/C22l2artQCK/>)

Tip:

Make sure you're training equally for the ascent AND descent here.

If you can, get outdoors or onto a hilly pedestrian path (if you live in a big city) and speed time ascending and descending. This will help train your quads and knee stability with the additional weight.

Tip:

Don't use a weighted vest instead of a packed backpack. Weight vests distribute the weight more evenly between the front and back of your body which makes it easier and doesn't adequately simulate carrying your backpack.

Training technique #2

Challenging Your Balance

During your strength sessions, in particular your Leg & Glute sessions (here are five of my favourite leg & glute exercises <https://www.instagram.com/p/C2sSqjEN86r/>), perform all your exercises with your backpack on, loaded with the full weight expected for your expedition.

This presents an excellent opportunity to assess weight distribution as you move in various, somewhat spontaneous directions—contrasting with the repetitive forward motion of your Aerobic Zone 2 Sessions.

Training with your backpack during Leg & Glute Sessions also challenges your balance and centre of gravity, more closely simulating the conditions you'll face during your expedition.

4 Tips For Integrating Load-Carrying In To Your Strength Sessions

1. Vary Your Movements

Incorporate movements that involve lateral (side-to-side) and rotational movements to better mimic the unpredictable nature of trekking/climbing on uneven terrain.

2. Use Unstable Surfaces

Try performing some exercises on a balance board or Bosu ball to further challenge your stabilising muscles. This will enhance your proprioception and overall balance.

3. Close Your Eyes

To challenge your balance even more, close your eyes during some of your exercises. This removes visual cues and forces your body to rely more on proprioceptive feedback, engaging smaller stabilising muscles to keep you balanced.

4. Single-Leg Exercises

Incorporate single-leg exercises such as single-leg deadlifts or single-leg squats. These exercises are excellent for improving balance and targeting stabilising muscles in the legs and core.

Tip:

When possible, train in the boots you're planning on climbing or trekking in. Not only will you better simulate the conditions you're going to experience but you'll also be able to narrow down any hot spots, lacing issues, or sock issues through your training.

Training technique #3

Over-Load Carrying

Over-load carrying means progressively increasing the weight of your backpack by 25% to 50% more than your planned expedition weight. This method significantly boosts your strength and endurance under a heavier load, providing a more intense training stimulus and building immense mental endurance.

How to Implement Over-Load Carrying:

1. **Gradual Increase:** Start by carrying 25% more than your expected expedition weight and gradually increase to 50%. Here's a sample progression for someone planning to carry 20kg/44lbs on their expedition:

Week 1 to 4: Over-load carry 25kg/55lbs

Week 5 to 8: Over-load carry 30kg/66lbs

2. **Frequency:** Dedicate one session per week to over-load carrying. This session should ideally be a shorter Zone 2 session to ensure you're not overtraining.

Three Best Practices for Over-Load Carrying

1. *Monitor* Your Form

Pay close attention to your posture and form. Carrying heavier weights can put extra strain on your body, so it's crucial to maintain proper alignment to prevent injury. To ensure good posture, especially in the upper area of your back and chest, think about lightly squeezing a pencil between your shoulder blades.

2. *Use Proper* Gear

Make sure your backpack is well-fitted and designed to carry heavier loads. Read "The 5 Tips For Perfect Backpack Weight Distribution" on the next page!

3. *Mix* It Up

Incorporate different terrains and elevations into your over-load carrying sessions. Think about ascents AND descents as well as terrain that forces you take a variety of small and big steps.

Tip:

Don't have a solid training plan yet? I'd love to help. Mountain-specific training plans are my thing/obsession. You can get more info about the three types of training programs I offer here:

www.kate-sielmann.com/work-with-me

5-Tips For Perfect Backpack Weight Distribution

When most people gear up for a mountaineering or trekking expedition, the often-overlooked factor is the art of backpack weight distribution.

I'll admit, that used to be me.

Back in the days, I would haphazardly stuff everything into my backpack without rhyme or reason.

And then wonder why I was in agony twenty-eight minutes later. To make matters worse, whenever I needed something, it was a frustrating endeavour to unpack and repack because I couldn't remember where I had stashed anything. Thankfully, time and experience have given me a wealth of knowledge and as a result I've developed a system that not only makes carrying my backpack comfortable (in a Type 2 kind of way) but also ensures a streamlined approach to locating things!

Here are five tips from that system so that you too can perfect your weight distribution and as a result have a much, much more enjoyable climb or trek:

1. Backpack Selection

Your backpack should be a perfect match for your body size, shape, and the demands of your trek or expedition. For instance, a load-carrying peak like Aconcagua calls for a 70/80L backpack, whereas a peak like Mont Blanc requires a 30/40L backpack.

Tip:

When you buy a backpack, make sure you test it while it is fully weighted. Every backpack feels perfect when it hasn't got any weight in it. Always test if fully weighted before deciding whether it's the right one for you.

2. The Three Weight Categories

1. **Heavy items** (tent, sleeping bag): These belong at the core of your backpack, close to your back. This central placement enhances stability and preserves your centre of gravity.
2. **Medium-weight items** (clothing layers, cookware): Surround the heavy items with medium-weight gear. Distribute them evenly to maintain equilibrium.
3. **Light items** (snacks, maps, headlamp): Reserve exterior pockets or the top lid of your backpack for lighter gear.

3. Stuff Sacks and Dry Sacks

Stuff sacks and dry bags are FANTASTIC for compartmentalising your gear. These organisational tools simplify item retrieval and prevent shifting during your ascent. These bags/sacks also provide an additional waterproof layer on the off chance you get caught in the rain.



Label each bag or sack so that it's easier to know exactly what's in each bag/sack.

4. Your Body's Centre Of Gravity

Sync your backpack's centre of gravity with your body's centre of gravity to sustain stability. Adjust the backpack's straps to ensure the load rests comfortably on your hips, empowering your legs to bear the weight instead of your shoulders.

Secure the hip belt firmly to distribute weight across your pelvis, and fine-tune the shoulder straps to eliminate sagging or pulling.

5. Think left to right and right to left

Do your best to distribute the weight evenly from left to right, ensuring that heavier items are evenly balanced between both sides of your backpack.

This equilibrium reduces strain on your spine and hips, resulting in a more pleasant and efficient ascent or trek. Make sure your straps are equally tightened on both sides.



Once you've tested and adjusted your backpack to perfection, use a permanent marker to mark the perfect length on your backpack straps. It'll make finding the perfect positioning super easy and consistent every time you put your pack on.

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