

## Tips for Healthy Hiking by Trudy Scott-Prevost

The hiking in Dominica is extraordinary. There is a multitude of trails, one for almost every person and every level of fitness. Stress is forgotten and the heart soars at the beauty of the natural surroundings.

Hiking is an excellent exercise program. A good hike works almost all the muscles of the body, enhances deep belly breathing and improves stamina. Here are some tips to ensure you have the most enjoyable hike possible:

- **Eat a good breakfast.** For a sustained source of energy during the hike.
- **Warm up before a hike.** A quick self massage and/or gentle stretch of the legs, lower back, arms, shoulders and neck will increase the blood flow to muscles that you'll want to have functioning smoothly when you hike. Remember; your muscles aren't ready for a deep stretch until after the hike.
- **Practice deep rhythmic breathing when hiking.** This increases stamina and enables more oxygenated blood to flow to the muscles.
- **Wear comfortable shoes.** The whole body is thrown out of alignment when our feet are uncomfortable.
- **Drink plenty of water.** You need to drink more often to stay well hydrated in tropical environs.
- **Pack carbohydrates.** Roasted plantain, dasheen or yam; breadnuts; granola; dried fruits and nuts and fresh fruit provide an instant pick-me-up on the trail.
- **Use a hiking stick or hiking poles.** To give extra stability and help prevent sore knees and hips by taking some of the pressure off knee joints and leg muscles and putting it on arm and shoulder muscles.
- **Stretch at the trail head after the hike.** It is a fact that hiking dramatically tightens certain muscle groups while doing nothing for others. While your muscles are still warm, do a deep stretching routine especially stretching the hamstrings, calves, quads and shoulders. Do all stretches on both sides of your body. Hold each stretch for about 8 to 10 seconds. Devote 10 to 20 minutes to stretching.
- **Circle the joints before and after hiking.** Picture drawing a circle with the top of the head, hands, big toe (movement is from the ankle) and shoulders. Working each area slowly, in both directions, one at a time with full focus on the area. This increases range of motion and prevents and alleviates stiffness.
- **Massage at home after the hike.** The massage - whether by your own hands or your therapists' - can also be done deeper and harder to really work the lactic acid and kinks out of the body.
- **Remember the health of the environment reflects the health of the society.** Do not leave your trash behind. Stay on designated trails and walk in the center of the path to avoid trampling trailside plants. Leave plants, rocks and historical artifacts for others to enjoy.

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