

## Six Steps to Enlightenment

1. **Develop a baseline.** Inventory your clothing and equipment using Excel and a digital postal scale (like the Royal eX-3, available for \$35 on Amazon.com) so you can see the sources of your pack's weight and identify the areas that are most ripe for a weight reduction. This may be a reality check, but do not despair – until they saw the "light," nearly every lightweight backpacker was a heavyweight one first.
2. **Take less stuff.** Before your trip, lay out the gear that you intend to take, and ask yourself, "What do I really *need*? And what do I just *want*?" Inform your decisions by knowing your destination's terrain, trail conditions, weather, remoteness, and natural hazards. Be wary of the "what if" and "just in case" items – it's easy to be carried away here. You need not purge your pack of all luxury items, but do limit them, and choose those that have high luxury-to-weight ratios. After a trip, identify items you did not use or need, and consider leaving them at home next time.
3. **Take lighter gear.** Consider a tarp or a single-wall tent instead of a conventional tent; a homemade alcohol stove instead of a canister or white gas model; one high-loft insulated jacket instead of multiple fleece layers; and a mini-LED light instead of a full-size headlamp. With a lighter load, you are then able to comfortably wear trail running shoes instead of boots, and carry a lightweight pack instead of an overbuilt one. A collection of lightweight gear will be less expensive than traditional equipment (simpler designs, fewer materials, and less stuff) and you can finance the upgrades by selling your old heavy equipment on eBay. Note that some lightweight gear requires advanced skills: you should learn how to pitch your tarp in your backyard first; you will want to practice map-and-compass before ditching your GPS; and by keeping your down sleeping bag dry, it will keep you warmer.
4. **Simplify your kit by using multi-use gear and eliminating redundancies.** Pitch your shelter with your trekking poles. Wear your clothing at night for extra insulation, and carry a lighter sleeping bag. An ultralight windshirt is windproof, bugproof, water resistant, and an additional layer against the cold. Your sleeping pad can serve as a "virtual frame" for your frameless pack. Duct tape and Crazy Glu are incredibly versatile in the areas of first aid and gear repair. One poncho/tarp can replace your shelter, raingear, and pack cover. The combination of soft-sided water bottles with some extra clothing inside a stuff sack is a comfortable pillow. And a spork is a one-utensil solution to popular backcountry foods like soups, noodles, and the synthetic freeze-dried protein chunks.
5. **Modify your gear to make it lighter and more functional.** Ice axe loops, daisy chains, excess webbing (from shoulder, waist, and sternum straps), and/or hydration sleeve housing should be removed from your pack if they are of no use to you. Ditto for shirt tags, guidebook margins, and pot handles. Chop toothbrushes, foam sleeping pads, and lexan utensils to make them lighter and more packable. If your equipment does not have a feature that you need (like a pocket, or a strap that will accommodate snowshoes), then add it.
6. **Choose calorie-dense food and optimize hydration.** Food and water should not be overlooked: for lightweight backpackers these consumable items frequently weigh as much, and often more, than clothing and equipment, especially during dry and/or remote stretches. One ounce of fat equals 240 calories, while one ounce of protein and/or carbs equals just 100 calories. So increase the caloric density of your food by brining nuts, spreads (PB, butter, Nutella), oils, Pringles, and non-fat cheese. Water-heavy foods like fresh fruit and vegetables should be avoided, eaten early-on in the trip, and/or dehydrated beforehand. Overall, the ideal calories/ounce ratio is between 120 and 140. Reduce water weight by hydrating more *at* water sources and *at more* water sources so you can carry less water *and* stay continually hydrated.

Reducing your pack weight is a process, and it takes time. However, there are at least four things you can do to accelerate the time it takes you to become a lightweight, ultralight, or superlight backpacker:

1. **Be willing to try something new and to change your ways.** This is especially tough for experienced conventional backpackers – but there's a reason why once someone goes light, they never go back.
2. **Invest in new gear.** You can only lose so much weight by taking less stuff and modifying what you have.
3. **Get educated.** Research the product lines of lightweight manufacturers; learn about the technology behind common fabrics and materials; and attend backpacking clinics, wilderness medicine courses, and wilderness survival programs so you can rely more on what's between your ears than what's on your back. Read books about lightweight backpacking (e.g. Ryan Jordan's *Lightweight Backpacking & Camping* and Don Ladigin's *Lighten Up!*) and visit websites like BackpackingLight.com, GoLite.com, and AndrewSkurka.com.
4. **Get out there!** By going on frequent and/or extended backpacking trips, or even just by conducting trials in your backyard, you determine what gear works well (or does not work well) and what gear you really need in certain conditions, and what gear suits your personal preferences and needs.

Source: AndrewSkurka.com and GoLite.com