

What is Rucking?

(Tip: You Better Start Before You Enroll)

Regardless of which branch of the armed services you're thinking about joining, I guarantee that you'll have to get very comfortable with rucking.

One of the most common forms of physical fitness training, rucking can help to prepare you for long stretches of navigating foreign terrain with up to 50 pounds on your back.

Let's take a look at the benefits of rucking, how to get started with rucking, and how to shop for the best rucking equipment.

Rucking Definition

In its most basic form, rucking is walking a specific distance with a weighted pack on your back.

But there's much more to rucking than this.

Rucking puts a hefty demand on your body, requiring as much mental energy and stamina as it does physical effort.

Your body will learn to endure continuous physical challenges while you learn to discipline your mind, pushing yourself and building grit.

Then when you're in the field, you'll feel thankful for the hours you spent walking miles with a weighted ruck pack because your body will be ready for the challenge.

Benefits of Rucking

Here are some of the benefits that you can expect when you make rucking a part of your weekly workout program.

Cardiovascular Fitness

Rucking isn't just a leisurely stroll through a park, it is a proven calorie burner that spikes your metabolism and help you burn more calories than walking alone.

Low-Impact Exercise

Rucking is also a form of Low-Intensity Steady State (LISS) training, which means it helps to support fat loss while having a low impact on your joints and connective tissue.

Builds Strength

While the results won't be as dramatic as actual strength training with weights, rucking can help to strengthen the lower body, particularly the quadriceps, hamstrings, and glutes.

Scalability

Regardless of your fitness level, you can do rucking. Since you're only adjusting three variables – weight, distance, and intensity – rucking is easy to scale based on your fitness experience, preferences, and goals.

Simplicity and Convenience

In terms of simplicity and convenience, this type of workout doesn't get any easier. You simply warm-up, stretch, throw a ruck sack on your back, and go. That's it.

How Often Should I Ruck?

How often you ruck depends on your current fitness level, goals, and workout program.

In general, the newer you are to rucking, the more weight you are carrying, or the more often you are training in other areas (e.g., weightlifting), the less you want to ruck – usually no more than three times per week.

If you're experienced, going lighter on the weight, and focusing primarily on rucking, you can ruck more – up to five times per week.

Like any type of exercise, too much rucking and a lack of focus on recovery can lead to overtraining.

What's more, if you are rucking without proper form or if you're using more weight than your body can handle, you can develop poor posture. If you already have poor posture, rucking can worsen it.

Be sure to maintain proper form throughout the exercise and stay within a reasonable distance and weight.

How Far/Long Should I Ruck?

No matter what your fitness level is right now, I think an appropriate long-term goal to shoot for would be to ruck for two hours with 50 pounds.

This is going to be a realistic expectation for any branch of the armed services you are expecting to join.

The way I'd break down your distance and time would be no less than 20 minutes per mile. This is what you want to strive to hit, especially as a beginner.

But as you become more experienced and your fitness level increases, you want to try to beat this time.

In general, here are some recommendations for time and distance for each rucking workout you do. Keep in mind that you might want to adjust these times and distances based on your other workouts for the week.

- Beginners: 40 to 60 minutes (2 to 3 miles)
- Intermediate: 60 to 90 minutes (3 to 5 miles)
- Advanced: 90 to 120 minutes (5+ miles)

What Weight Should I Ruck With?

If you haven't been physically active in a long time, I recommend that you start with basic walking – no weights or equipment. You want to properly prepare your body for the workload to come. Focus on proper walking posture and gait.

When you're able to walk for a few miles without feeling overly fatigued, then I would recommend starting with rucking.

For your first rucking workout, place 10% of your bodyweight in a ruck sack. Then every week or two thereafter, add 1 to 5 pounds.

Again, add weight, time, or intensity based on your other workouts.

If it's going to be a heavy leg day on Monday, do a lighter rucking workout on Tuesday followed by a heavier rucking workout on Thursday or Friday.

Rucking Equipment

Yes, you can use a regular backpack to ruck, but I highly recommend making the investment in an actual rucking pack.

These rucking packs are designed to securely hold weight while supporting proper posture. If you use a backpack, you risk having the weights roll around or shift from side to side, throwing off your posture.

Here are a few things to look for when buying a rucking pack:

Nylon: The pack should have nylon throughout, including the stitching

Padding: The pack should have thick padding around the shoulders and the back.

Straps: All of the straps need to be reinforced.

Zippers: The pack should have large, durable zippers that can withstand the extra weight.

Pockets: You'll want secure weight pockets to hold the weight as you walk.

Reviews: Try to find a brand that has consistently good reviews over the course of years, not a few weeks.

As for the weights themselves, if you have the budget, I'd highly recommend going with the same brand of weights as your ruck sack.

Usually, brands make compatible weights, making it easier to find the appropriate weights that will fit securely.

If your wallet is a bit tight right now, consider the following alternatives:

Traditional Weights

You can use weights you already have such as dumbbells or smaller barbell plates. Just make sure the weights are evenly dispersed in the pack.

Sandbags

You can also use sandbags in the pack. Sand is inexpensive at local hardware stores and free if you live near a beach.

Water / Milk Jugs

Finally, don't discredit those gallon water and milk jugs in your house. You can fill up a few of those, make sure the lid is glued on, and use those as your weight.