

RUCKING PROGRESSION

AN EVIDENCE-BASED LOAD & DISTANCE GUIDE

Why Rucking Works

Rucking — walking with a weighted backpack — combines steady-state cardiovascular loading with axial resistance training in a single low-skill movement. Military load-carriage research (US Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine) has repeatedly shown that adding external load raises metabolic cost and lower-body muscular demand roughly linearly with load, without the joint-impact profile of running.

Starting Load

Beginners: 10% of bodyweight, capped around 20 lbs (9 kg). Intermediate: 15-20% of bodyweight. Advanced / military-style training: up to 30% of bodyweight for short, structured sessions only. Load should sit high and close to the back — a purpose-built ruck plate carrier or a plate wrapped in a towel inside a sturdy backpack keeps the load stable and prevents shifting, which is the primary cause of rucking-related back strain.

Pace & Distance Basics

Target pace: roughly 15-20 minutes per mile (a brisk but sustainable walk, not a march). Beginners should start with 1-2 miles, 2-3 times per week, and add no more than 10% total weekly distance at a time — the same conservative progression rule used in running-injury prevention research applies directly to load carriage.

8-WEEK PROGRESSION

LOAD, DISTANCE, AND PACE BY WEEK

Week	Load	Distance	Sessions/wk
1-2	10% bodyweight	1-1.5 mi	2
3-4	10-15% bodyweight	1.5-2.5 mi	2-3
5-6	15% bodyweight	2.5-3.5 mi	3
7	15-20% bodyweight	3.5-4.5 mi	3
8	20% bodyweight	4-5 mi	3

Progression Rule

Increase only one variable at a time — load OR distance, never both in the same week. If joint discomfort, not muscular fatigue, appears at any point, hold the current week's parameters for an additional week before progressing. This mirrors the conservative load-management approach used in strength and conditioning research to reduce overuse injury risk.

SAFETY & GEAR CHECKLIST

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS TO GET RIGHT

Footwear

Supportive footwear with a stable heel counter matters more under load than in unweighted walking — added weight increases ground-reaction forces and ankle-stabilization demand with every step.

Posture

Keep the torso upright, not leaning forward from the hips to compensate for the load — forward lean is the most common technique fault and the main driver of lower-back strain in load-carriage studies.

Pre-Session Checklist

- ☐ Load secured high and tight against the back, no shifting when you jump in place
- ☐ Footwear broken in — never rucking in brand-new shoes
- ☐ Water carried for sessions over 45 minutes
- ☐ Route chosen with a bailout point for the first 4 weeks
- ☐ Load and distance logged after every session

Source Note

Load-carriage and metabolic-cost figures referenced are consistent with published military physiology research (US Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine) and general strength-and-conditioning progression principles. This guide is educational and not a substitute for individualized medical or training advice.