



## Cold Weather Exercise: Tips for Staying Healthy and Injury-Free

Don't let cold weather put the freeze on your outdoor exercise. Whether you are running, cycling, snowboarding or simply walking, following some basic precautions can still keep you working out when the weather turns chilly.

**1. Warm up.** Warming up before exercising is always important, but even more so when it gets cold. In winter weather, muscles tighten up and take longer to get loose. Add extra minutes to your warm-up and regardless, make sure it's a minimum of 10-15 minutes.

**2. Layer up.** According to the Mayo Clinic, many cold weather outdoor exercisers make the mistake of dressing too warmly, which causes the body to overheat and sweat rapidly. Yet once the sweat starts to dry, you can get chilled. The best solution is to dress in layers, removing them as you start to sweat and putting them back on as needed. The first layer should be made from a synthetic material such as polypropylene that draws sweat away from your body. The second layer should be a thicker material such as fleece or wool for insulation and warmth. The third layer should be a waterproof, breathable shell to block wind or rain.

**3. Protect Your Extremities.** A hat is particularly important for the outdoor athlete as roughly 50% of all body heat generated is lost through the surface of the head. Hats with polypropylene layers serve the same function for the wicking of head perspiration as on the body. Like the head, hands should be similarly protected. Consider buying exercise shoes a half-size larger in the winter to allow for thick thermal socks or an extra pair of regular socks. Don't forget a headband to protect your ears if your hat doesn't cover them. Lastly, protective sunscreen and sunglasses are essential on bright days.

**4. Stay hydrated.** Dehydration is as significant a concern in the winter cold as it is in the summer heat. Drink water or an electrolytic sports drink before, during and after your workout, even if you're not really thirsty. For optimum hydration, try to drink 8 to 12 cups of water each day and ideally, ½ to 1 cup of water every 15 to 20 minutes during exercise.

**5. Watch the forecast.** Cold temperatures combined with wind create a wind chill that can make exercising outdoors unsafe even if you dress warmly. If temperatures dip below 10 degrees when you're hitting the slopes or if the wind chill is extreme, take a break or consider an indoor activity instead. Take extra precautions if you choose to exercise outdoors anyway.

**6. Watch for signs of frostbite or hypothermia.** Frostbite and hypothermia are the two chief cold weather injuries. Frostbite is the freezing of the skin or body tissue through exposure to cold. Early warning signs can include numbness, loss of feeling or a stinging sensation. Hypothermia is the reduction of the body's core temperature to such an extent it can no longer generate heat to keep itself warm. Signs and symptoms include intense shivering, slurred speech, loss of coordination and fatigue.

**Put it all together for cold-weather safety.** Staying fit throughout the winter is possible for everyone. As always, consult with your doctor if you have certain conditions such as asthma, heart problems or other conditions that can be exacerbated by the cold. The tips above can also help you stay safe—and warm—while working out in winter.