

Exercise & Cold Weather

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Cold weather might make you feel like hibernating, but you don't have to give up your exercise routine in cold weather. Exercise can help keep those winter blues at bay, improve energy levels, and help you sleep better. No matter whether you are indoors or out, try to set aside 30 minutes or more most days of the week for physical activity. Remember it doesn't need to be all in one stretch of time and it doesn't have to be strenuous. For example make a workout of household cleaning or walk the stairs in your home. Whatever you choose, make sure to balance the four main types of exercise (aerobic, strength training, balance, and flexibility). Mall walk for aerobic, on alternate days lift hand weights, or work out at home to tai chi or yoga tapes for balance and flexibility. There has been much debate on what was the most appropriate way to prepare your body for exercising in cold weather, today winter sports and fitness experts recommend a layered system of synthetic lightweight fabrics. Here are some tips to make the most of your layers:

Layering - Choose synthetic microfibers, such as polypropylene which wicks sweat away from your body, for the clothing layers closest to your skin. Cotton products tend to hold the moisture close to your body. The second layer is insulation, such as lightweight fleece with a zipper to release excess body heat/perspiration. The third layer should be your layer against the elements that is windproof/waterproof.

Hands/feet - in extreme cold use gloves or mittens with the same type of layering system. In general mittens are warmer than gloves. For feet, wool or propylene socks are best and do not wear shoes that are too tight as it reduces circulation. All-climate shoes that are water resistant are also available.

Neck/head - since you can lose 35%-40% of your body heat from this area it needs to be covered. Again wool or fleece are good choices for covering your head. There is a fleece head sock available (a skiers best friend) which also covers the neck. Face masks that not only cover the face against the elements, but cover the nose and mouth to help keep the air you breath warmer and more humid.

Enjoy yourself and stay safe when you exercise. Be aware of wind chill as the wind can penetrate clothing. Fast motions, such as running, cycling, and skating increases air movement and also creates wind chill. It is advised if temp is below 0°F or wind chill is -20°F to exercise indoors. Be aware of signs and symptoms of frostbite and hypothermia and remember to eat well and drink plenty of fluids. For more exercise ideas/tips during the cold months don't hesitate to ask a physical therapist, athletic trainer, or fitness professional.