

10 TIPS TO KEEP YOU MOVING THIS WINTER

Contributed by Heidi Roth, RDN, CHHC

As the weather gets colder and the days get shorter it's easy to find a lot of reasons to skip exercise and think of it as one of those "optional" activities. While it is easier to cozy up by the fire, winter exercise is still just as beneficial- it simply takes a little planning and a slight mindset shift.

In fact, there are SO many reasons to stay active outside during the winter!

- Fresh air and sunlight naturally lift your mood.
- Exercising releases endorphins that help prevent the winter blues.
- Regular movement helps prevent cardiovascular disease and diabetes, in addition to boosting your immune function during cold and flu season.
- It helps you sleep better.
- Winter air is invigorating which is especially good for our energy levels as well as stress relief.

An added bonus: during winter there's no heat and humidity to deal with, and it's a great way to get a little extra sunlight and that much-needed vitamin D!

Plus, spending time outside makes the winter go by faster. Instead of counting down to spring, you might find that you actually enjoy it! What did you love about winter as a child? Chances are, you still might enjoy it. Try some activities like sledding, ice skating, cross-country skiing, brisk walking, snowshoeing, or even winter cycling with a fat-tire bike. And, one more benefit - research shows you can burn up to 34% more calories exercising in cold weather!

So, start small and build up gradually to longer sessions and see where it takes you!

Here are some tips to help you exercise safely in winter.

1. Stay Warm and Dry

Invest in some cold-weather clothes. The Scandinavians say "There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing," and it's true. Quality gear makes all the difference!

2. Think Layers

Start with a breathable base layer, add an insulating layer, and top it off with a super warm coat, waterproof boots, and a nice hat. Wool is an excellent choice to breathe with you - it helps to keep you warm but also wicks away moisture. There are a lot of high-tech fabrics that also work well. Leave the cotton for summer - it traps moisture and loses its warmth in the cold.

3. Choose Safe Surfaces

Safety first! To avoid slipping and injuring yourself, look for packed-down trails or cleared sidewalks, ideally salted. Hiking sticks or even ski poles can be helpful to keep your balance if you're walking on an uneven surface.

4. Change Up Your Footwear

This is a must. Hiking boots are a good choice or trail shoes with added traction will help keep you steady. If it's icy outside, consider adding spikes or traction cleats for extra security - or opt for a safer indoor workout instead.

5. Cover Your Face

Wear a face mask or scarf to cover your mouth, especially if you have asthma or a reactive airway. It will help warm up and humidify the air, helping you to breathe easily.





6. Pay Attention to How You Feel

Cold weather can mask dehydration and fatigue, so listen to your body and come back inside if you're starting to feel too cold. Drink water before, during, and after your workout to stay well-hydrated.

7. Consider Some Safety Gear if It's Dark Outside

If you're going outside early in the morning or after sunset, don't forget to wear something reflective and bring a headlamp or flashlight.

8. Make it Social

Joining a group, a winter fitness challenge, or even just getting a walking buddy can help keep you motivated and add a little extra enjoyment!

9. Enjoy a Whole New World of Nature's Beauty

Take some time to look around. There's nothing prettier than a "bluebird day" - a deep blue sky, white snow, and sparkly ice on the trees. It can be a magical winter wonderland! It can also be gray and gloomy... but there's also a quiet beauty to that. Know that when you come inside, the warmth and hot tea will seem so luxurious.

10. Warm Down Indoors

After an outdoor workout, do your cool-down routine indoors to allow your body temperature to come down gradually in a warm environment.

Outdoor exercise in the winter not your thing? Well, there are many ways to bring it inside as well!

- Consider investing in a treadmill, stationary bike, or my favorite - a rowing machine! If you have one of these already gathering dust, it might be time to put it back to use.
- Online classes and virtual workouts are a great way to try something new. There are countless free Youtube classes that include everything from short HIIT (high-intensity interval training) workouts to yoga and pilates.
- Winter is also a great time to work on flexibility and joint mobility using foam rollers and stretching.
- Lastly, don't overlook "exercise snacks!" Brief bursts of physical activity, such as squats, lunges, or running up and down stairs can help lower your risk of diabetes, cardiac disease, and obesity. Studies show that even just doing this for ONE MINUTE 3x/day can have benefits!

While it may be tempting to hibernate indoors, there are countless benefits to maintaining an active lifestyle during the winter. Whether braving the elements outdoors or opting for indoor workouts, staying active can help you improve your mood, boost your health, and even enjoy the beauty of the season. With the right gear, preparation, and mindset, you can make winter exercise an enjoyable and rewarding part of your routine. So, embrace the chill, get moving, and take full advantage of the unique opportunities winter offers!

How will you stay active this winter?



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