OHIO DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Frontlinefocus

EAP OHIO EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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Winter Fitness: Safety Tips for Exercising Outdoors

Dressing in layers, protecting your hands and feet, and paying attention to the forecast can help you stay safe and warm while exercising outdoors in cold weather.

Cold weather can discourage even the most motivated exercisers. And if you're not as motivated, it's all too easy to pack away your workout gear along with your warm-weather clothing. But you don't have to let cold weather spell the end of your exercise. With these tips for exercising during cold weather, you can stay fit, motivated and warm when the weather turns chilly.

Stay safe during cold-weather exercise

Almost everyone can exercise safely during cold weather. But if you have certain conditions, such as asthma, heart problems or Raynaud's disease, check with your doctor before you work out in cold weather. Your doctor can review any special precautions you need based on your condition or medications you might take.

The following tips can help you stay safe – and warm – while exercising in the cold.

Pay attention to weather conditions and wind chill

Before heading out, check the forecast for the time you'll be outside. Temperature, wind and moisture, along with the length of time that you'll be outside, are key considerations in planning a safe cold-weather workout.

The combination of wind and cold make up the wind chill index, which is commonly included in winter weather forecasts. Wind chill extremes can make exercising outdoors unsafe even if you dress warmly. The wind can penetrate your clothes and remove the insulating layer of warm air that surrounds your body and any exposed skin is vulnerable to frostbite.

Although the risk of frostbite is less than 5 percent when the air temperature is above 5 F (minus 15 C), the risk increases as the wind chill falls. At wind chill levels below minus 18 F (minus 27 C), frostbite can occur on exposed skin in 30 minutes or less.

If the temperature dips below 0 F (minus 17.8 C) or the wind chill is extreme, consider taking a break or choosing an indoor exercise instead. Similarly, consider putting off your workout if it's raining or snowing unless you have waterproof gear. Getting wet makes you more vulnerable to the cold. And if you get soaked, you may not be able to keep your core body temperature high enough.

Know the signs of frostbite and hypothermia

Frostbite is an injury to the body that is caused by freezing. Frostbite is most common on exposed skin, such as your cheeks, nose and ears, but it can also occur on hands and feet. Early warning signs include numbness, loss of feeling or a stinging sensation.

If you suspect frostbite, get out of the cold immediately and slowly warm the affected area – but don't rub it

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because that can damage your skin. If numbness continues, seek emergency care.

Hypothermia is abnormally low body temperature. When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Exercising in cold, rainy weather increases the risk of hypothermia, as does being an older adult.

Hypothermia signs and symptoms include intense shivering, slurred speech, loss of coordination and fatigue. Seek emergency help right away for possible hypothermia.

Dress in layers

One of the biggest mistakes you can make when exercising in cold weather is to dress too warmly. Exercise generates a considerable amount of heat – enough to make you feel like it's much warmer than it really is. The evaporation of sweat, however, can make you lose heat from your body and feel chilled. The solution?

Dress in layers that you can remove as soon as you start to sweat and then put back on as needed. First, put on a thin layer of synthetic material, such as polypropylene, which draws sweat away from your body. Avoid cotton, which stays wet next to your skin.

Next, add a layer of fleece or wool for insulation. Top this with a waterproof, breathable outer layer.

You may need to experiment before you find a combination of clothing that works well for you based on your exercise intensity. If you're lean, you may need more insulation than someone who is heavier.

Keep in mind, too, that stop-and-go activities, such as mixing walking with running, can make you more vulnerable to the cold if you repeatedly work up a sweat and then get chilly.

Protect your head, hands, feet and ears

When it's cold, blood flow is concentrated on your body's core, leaving your head, hands and feet vulnerable to frostbite. Try wearing a thin pair of glove liners made of a wicking material (like polypropylene) under a pair of heavier gloves or mittens lined with wool or fleece. Put on the mittens or gloves before your hands become cold and then remove the outer pair if your hands begin to sweat.

Considering buying exercise shoes a half-size or one size larger than usual to allow for thick thermal socks or an extra pair of regular socks. And don't forget a hat to protect your head or headband to protect your ears. If it's very cold, consider wearing a scarf or ski mask to cover your face.

Don't forget safety gear – and sunscreen

If it's dark when you exercise outside, wear reflective clothing. To stay steady on your feet, choose footwear with enough traction to prevent falls, especially if it's icy or snowy. Wear a helmet while skiing, snowboarding and snowmobiling. Consider using chemical heat packs to warm up your hands or feet, especially if you have a tendency to have cold fingers and toes or if you have a condition such as Raynaud's disease.

It's as easy to get sunburned in winter as in summer – even more so if you're exercising in the snow or at high altitudes. Wear a sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB rays and a lip balm that contains sunscreen as well. And protect your eyes from snow and ice glare with dark glasses or goggles.

Drink plenty of fluids

You need to stay well hydrated when exercising in cold weather just as you do when exercising in warm weather. Drink water or sports drinks before, during and after your workout, even if you're not really thirsty. You can become just as dehydrated in the cold as in the heat from sweating, breathing, the drying power of the winter wind and increased urine production, but it may be harder to notice during cold weather.

Putting it all together for cold-weather safety

These tips can help you safely – and enjoyably – exercise when the weather turns chilly. But as you exercise

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during cold weather, continually monitor how your body feels to help prevent cold-weather injuries, such as frostbite. Consider shortening your outdoor workout or skipping it altogether during weather extremes, and know when to head home and warm up. Also, be sure to let someone know your exercise route and your expected return time, in case something does go wrong.

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Cold-Weather Sports and Your Family

Looking forward to the snowy season and all it has to offer? Winter can be a great time to get outside and keep fit – for you and your family.

But what if everyone in your house believes that winter is a time for hibernating in front of the TV? Don't despair: the whole family can do lots of fun things once the weather turns frosty.

Beating the Cold-Weather Blahs

Once a chill is in the air, our bodies begin to want to conserve energy to use as heat. We tend to eat a little more and become less active. Being cooped up inside and being more sedentary can lead to the "cold-weather blahs." Kids might feel more tired, lethargic or even a little bored.

A good way to kick this feeling is to get them out into the snow to play! Winter can be a great time for family activities that allow you to spend time with your kids while being active.

Types of Cold-Weather Sports

Skiing, snowboarding, ice skating and snowshoeing are just a few sports that everyone in your family can try.

Snowboarding. Snowboarding is popular as kids especially love this type of snow "surfing," and many resorts offer the equipment for rental along with traditional skis. Snowboarding uses different techniques than downhill skiing, so your family should take a few lessons first. If you've been on a surfboard in water, you'll find the snowboarding style familiar.

Skiing. Alpine (downhill) skiing is an easy sport to try, but novice skiers should take a lesson first and get instructions on staying safe. Many ski resorts have reasonably priced lessons for first-timers. A competent instructor can show kids the proper techniques and ensure they start on a hill that's appropriate for their skill level.

Ice skating. You may remember struggling with weak ankle support when ice skating as a child, but great improvements in skate design have improved the skating experience. Take your family out to the rink for an afternoon or evening of ice skating. Many rinks rent molded fiberglass skates that have more ankle support and warmth than figure skates.

Cross-country skiing. For cross-country skiing, long, thin skis are used. This type of skiing uses a binding system that holds the ski boot to the ski by the boot's toe. This lets the heel move up and down naturally, enabling skiers to travel long distances and climb hills. It's a great cardiovascular workout and a wonderful way to enjoy the outdoors. Virtually any flat or near-flat snowy surface works.

Snowshoeing. Snowshoeing doesn't require any particular skills or specialized equipment, and it can be done almost anywhere there's snow. The snowshoeing technique is as easy as walking, so anyone can do it. If you like walking, hiking or running, you'll find that strapping on a pair of snowshoes is a great way to work out. The slower pace of snowshoeing also allows family members to stay together. Traditional snowshoes can be strapped onto any pair of boots without heels and can be rented from an outdoor equipment retailer.

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Cold-Weather Getaways

If you've decided to make the best of the cold weather, why not plan a weekend escape? You can easily fill your trip with plenty of fun cold-weather sports that will appeal to everyone in your family.

The Internet is a good way to begin your search. Online travel reservation services can help with resort guides. Many communities host consumer shows that focus on cold-weather activities; keep an eye on your local paper for places and dates.

A travel agent will also have listings of resorts that specialize in winter activities. Another good place to check is your state tourism bureau; these agencies usually have free brochures that list events in your area.

Staying Safe

As with all sports, it's important to take the proper precautions to stay safe. Helmets are a must when kids are skiing, snowboarding and snowmobiling, and should be considered when sledding and ice skating. Knee pads, wrist guards and shin guards also should be worn during winter sports. Even a low-speed spill can be damaging to delicate bones and joints.

To avoid hypothermia and frostbite, be sure that your family is well protected against the cold. Layers work best: begin with an undergarment made of a synthetic fiber that will wick away perspiration. A light shirt or turtleneck can go over that, followed by a sweater or fleece for warmth. Kids always can remove or add layers if needed. Don't forget a hat, gloves and sunglasses.

Apply sunscreen – snow functions as a reflecting agent and can intensify the sun's rays on skin, so kids can get a sunburn even during winter.

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New Year, New You: Getting fit and Staying that Way

Fitness club managers say Jan. 2 is the day they expect to see lots of new members arrive on their doorstep. After all our holiday feasting and winter comfort eating, many of us start the New Year by heading straight for the gym.

But the real fitness challenge isn't doing more sit-ups than you did last week. It's setting up an exercise program and sticking to it. Regular exercise helps you manage your weight, but the benefits go far beyond dropping a few pounds.

Feel Better

According to researchers at the Mayo Clinic, exercise can help improve your mood. When you exercise, your body produces chemicals that help you feel happier and more relaxed.[1] Exercise can help erase stress, help control the symptoms of menopause and even can reduce arthritis pain and stiffness.

Gain Energy

Of course a vigorous workout can make you feel tired – but it's a "good tired." As you get into an exercise routine, you'll find you have more energy, and more stamina, than you did before. Your heart, lungs and muscles get healthier. Bonus: stronger muscles help you burn more calories and that helps you lose weight.

Lower Your Risk

Regular exercise reduces your risk of heart disease, reduces the risk of getting colon or breast cancer, helps control blood pressure, lowers cholesterol levels, strengthens your bones and even lowers the risk of developing diabetes.[2] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state that, "people who are physically active for about seven hours a week have a 40 percent lower risk of dying earlier than those who are active for less than 30 minutes a week."[3] And that should be enough to get everybody off the couch!

Ready to Get Going?

Watch your fitness level increase as the numbers on your scale go down by combining three types of exercise:[4]

- **Aerobic exercise** – When you increase your heart rate, you can improve the health of your heart and lungs, increase circulation and burn calories;
- **Strength training** – Whether you're lifting weights, doing Pilates or using stretch bands for resistance, you build endurance and strengthen your muscles; and
- **Flexibility training** – Stretch your muscles and improve your range of motion. Yoga and tai chi are just a couple of ways to improve your flexibility.

The Mayo Clinic also recommends adding core stability and balance training to your routine.[5]

Always check with your health care provider before beginning any new exercise program.

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Making and Keeping Resolutions

We've all done it. We've charged headfirst into a New Year's resolution only to run out of steam after a few weeks. A new year is a great time to focus on new habits. The key to success is not to make too many resolutions and make each one do-able.

Let's say you really want to lose 40 pounds and fit into your "skinny jeans." That's a big goal, so break it down into smaller pieces. Make your first goal to lose five pounds. Decide how you'll do it. In this case, you might exercise four times a week and eat smaller portions. When you've lost the first five pounds, congratulate yourself. Then go on to the next five. You'll feel good each time you cross a goal off your list, and before you know it, you will have achieved your larger goal.

Ten Steps to Fitness

It takes time to make a new habit part of your daily life – so start today. Before the year is a month old, you'll be well on your way to a healthier lifestyle.

Take a walk. Schedule a brisk walk before breakfast or after dinner. Walk your dog. Pick at least one place you drive to each week and walk there instead.

Stretch! Write the alphabet with your toes before getting out of bed. Take a stretch break every hour at work. Reach toward the ceiling. Touch your toes.

Take the stairs. Riding the elevator burns zero calories – walking up the stairs gets your heart pumping.

Park farther away. Instead of circling the parking lot looking for a spot near the door, park at the end of the row and walk.

Go dancing. Take ballroom dancing, join a dance club or just dance in the living room to your favorite tunes.

Play with your kids. Go to the park and throw a softball or a Frisbee, learn to hula-hoop or kick a soccer ball around.

Ride your bike to work. Do something nice for your body and for the planet.

Jog with a buddy. Being accountable will keep you both moving forward.

Hop in the pool. Check with your community pool for classes and lap swim times.

Exercise with a group. Your local YMCA or fitness club offers workouts to fit any schedule and fitness level.

Resources

Visit liveandworkwell.com, the Live and Work Well website, use the search phrase "physical fitness" for information on developing a responsible fitness program for the entire family.

Sources:
1 - Mayo Clinic. Exercise: 7 benefits of regular activity.

2 - United States Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Fundamental to Preventing Disease. Available at http://aspe.hhs.gov/health/reports/physicalactivity/

3 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Physical Activity for Everyone: Physical Activity and Health, The Benefits of Physical Activity, (last reviewed December 3, 2008). Available athttp://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/health/index.html.

4 - The Merck Manual of Health and Aging. Exercise: Types of Exercise. Available athttp://www.merck.com/pubs/mmanual_ha/sec3/ch60/ch60d.html.

5 - Mayo Clinic. Fitness Training: 5 elements of a well-rounded routine (last reviewed Sept. 5, 2009).

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EAP
OHIO EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Your employee assistance program offers confidential help for personal problems and concerns. Concerned about a troubled family member who won't get help? Feel tired and exhausted, but don't know if it's burnout, loss of motivation, depression or all three? Late for work too often? Has the use of alcohol or drugs created a crisis you are facing right now? The bottom line, never wonder if your concern is appropriate to contact OEAP. So, if you've been putting off taking action to solve a serious issue that is weighing on you, give OEAP a call today.

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800-221-6327/614-644-8545
ohio.gov/eap

Robert Blair, Director
Ohio Department of Administrative Services

Debora Branham, *Assistant Benefits Administrator*

Andy Bensing, *OEAP Benefits Manager*

Carrie McKean, *Administrative Professional*

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