

## Theme PARC

January 2007

### Topic:

Exercising In The Cold

One of the many barriers for people being active can be weather concerns. But, there are certainly ways around being inactive during the cold winter months. One of the biggest concerns for exercising in the cold is hypothermia, or too much heat loss. Another barrier is safety.

Key Considerations for Exercising in the Cold:

- **Get your doctor's OK.** It always a good idea to get approval from your doctor that it is alright for you to exercise. For some people, cold air can trigger chest pain or asthma attacks. If you have any medical conditions or concerns about exercising outdoors, check with your doctor first.
- **Dress in layers.** Start with a thin layer of synthetic material such as polypropylene, which draws sweat away from your body. Next try fleece for insulation. Top this with a waterproof, breathable outer layer. To warm the air you breathe, wear a face mask or a scarf over your mouth. Remember to wear a hat and gloves, too. It's always better to start off being warm and peel the layers off if you get overheated.
- **Choose appropriate gear.** If you'll be outdoors when natural light is poor, wear reflective clothing. To stay steady on your feet, choose footwear with enough traction to prevent falls. Wear a helmet for downhill sports, especially if you're a beginner.
- **Remember sunscreen.** Just because it is winter does not mean the sun's harmful rays are not burning your skin. Snow reflects the sun's rays, so sunburn is possible even if you're cold. Protect your lips too by wearing a SPF lip balm.
- **Head into the wind.** Choose the route of your walk by the direction of the wind. You'll be less likely to get chilled on the way back if you end your workout — when you may be sweaty — with the wind at your back.
- **Drink plenty of fluids.** Drink water or sports drinks before, during and after your workout — even if you're not thirsty. Cold air has a drying effect, which can increase the risk of dehydration. In turn, dehydration increases the risk of frostbite.
- **Pay attention to wind chill.** The wind can penetrate your clothes and remove the insulating layer of warm air that surrounds your body. Fast motion — such as skiing, running, cycling or skating — also creates wind chill because it increases air movement past your body. When the temperature is 10 F and the air is calm, skiing at 20 miles an hour creates a wind chill of minus 9.

If the temperature dips well below zero or the wind chill is below minus 20, choose an indoor activity instead.

- **Know when to call it quits.** If you notice a patch of hard, pale, cold skin, you may have frostbite. Get out of the cold and slowly warm the affected area. If numbness continues, seek emergency care. If you suspect hypothermia — characterized by intense shivering, slurred speech, loss of coordination and fatigue — seek emergency care.
- **Try exercising indoors if it is too cold.** There are always indoor options when the weather is too cold or icy. Mall walking, gyms, indoor activities such as indoor pools are also great options when the weather prevents you from enjoying the great outdoors.

Keep in mind. Getting outside in the colder weather also has a great impact on your mental health during the cold dark winter months. Remember if you bundle up there is no reason why you can not enjoy the colder weather and get a great workout while you are at it.