

Article 014

Exercising in the cold

Winter is a time when many of us put on extra kilos. When it's cold and grey outside it is easy to talk ourselves into putting our weight loss and exercise programs on hold. But as we all know, the secret to losing or maintaining a healthy weight is to eat healthily and exercise regularly - even in the depths of winter!

Australian's are generally spoilt when it comes to exercising outside. Very few of us need to contemplate exercise in truly freezing weather.

In fact, the greatest risk most of us face when it comes to exercising in winter is the risk of finding something else to do instead that involves an open fire and a bottle of wine rather than attacking a walking track at the local park.

Nevertheless, there are a few things that we should keep in mind when considering exercising outside during winter that will help keep us safer, healthier, happier and more motivated than ever.

Managing Heat Loss

The biggest health concern with exercising in the cold is heat loss. When we exercise in cold weather we need to ensure that your body doesn't lose too much heat.

To stay suitably warm when exercising in the cold:

- Wear something on your head. Most heat loss occurs from the head so wearing a beanie or cap will help you maintain a safe temperature.
- Keep your torso warm at all times. We can also lose a lot of heat from here to.

- Wear clothes that trap air, not sweat. Trapped air keeps us warm, trapped sweat makes us cold.
- Avoid wearing heavy cotton sweats or tightly woven material close to your skin. These materials absorb and retain moisture.
- Invest in workout wear made from material designed to move sweat away from the body, like 'DRI-FIT' from Nike and 'Dryline' from Brooks.
- Wear clothes in layers so you can shed or add insulation at any time. Keep layers down to 3 or 4 and if exercising when wet, ensure your top layer is waterproof.
- Keep your hands and feet warm. Cold weather causes your body to move blood away from the hands and feet towards the centre of the body to warm and protect your internal organs.

Warming up

Warming up properly before exercising is important at any time, but it takes on extra significance when the weather is cold.

Cold, tight muscles can't perform well and are susceptible to injury.

A good warm up generally consists of two parts; a low intensity activity that elevates our heart rate and warms up our muscles and easy stretching.

When it's cold, it takes longer for muscles to warm up to a safe temperature. As a result, we need to increase the amount of time we allocate to warming up.

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As a general guide, a slightly elevated heart rate and light perspiration are good indicators that our body has begun to warm up and we can safely stretch our muscles.

Flexibility between individuals varies greatly. But for most of us, 5 minutes of gentle stretching after a low-intensity warm up is usually sufficient most of the time. In cold weather however, our pre-exercise stretching may need to be extended to between 5 and 10 minutes, or longer if we have particularly tight or problem muscles.

Stretching is such an important part of exercising and it is crucial that you remember these key points:

- Never bounce when stretching.
- Stretch s-l-o-w-l-y and steadily.
- Hold each stretch for a slow count to 10.
- Never stretch a muscle so far that it causes pain.

Finally, if you're new to exercise or you have any health problems that you suspect may limit your ability to exercise in cold weather safely, always consult a doctor first.