

Advice for exercising in the cold

By Mike DeCinti

When people find out I'm not originally from the South (and most often it's my lack of a southern accent that gives me away) I always get asked the same question. "So, what brought you to Lumberton?" And since I'm incapable of giving a short answer, I always feel the need to not only explain how I got to Lumberton, but the South in general. You see I'm what they call a "displaced northerner" born and raised in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, just outside the Pocono Mountains. NASCAR fans know it as the site of the Pocono 500 and nature lovers know it for its fall foliage. So how did I get here and why did I leave? Well first let me tell you that before living in Lumberton I spent four years in Newberry, SC lived a year in Columbia, Missouri, and before that I moved around Pennsylvania like I was on the run from the law. But with that said, my answer becomes quite simple. The reason I now live in Lumberton is because of my job and the reason I live in the South is because of the weather.

That's right, I was just sick and tired of the cold. The average high temperature in Wilkes-Barre this time of year is 40 degrees; in Lumberton it's 60. The average low in Wilkes-Barre is 25; in Lumberton it's 35. I guess it could have been worse. I could have grown up in the coldest US city, International Falls, Minnesota with an average high of 23 and an average low of 10. Brrrrrr.

Why the geography lesson? Simple, whether you're in Minnesota, Pennsylvania or North Carolina, to some degree it's going to be cold, and if you're going to exercise in the cold, you need to take special precautions.

Cold exposure can make outdoor activity uncomfortable or even dangerous for anyone unprepared for colder weather. It's important to be aware of the early warning signs and symptoms of cold exposure and how to prevent problems.

Shivering is usually the first sign of dangerous cold exposure, as the body is trying to generate its own heat through uncontrolled muscle contraction. The two most dangerous conditions that can result from cold weather exposure are frostbite and hypothermia. Symptoms of frostbite include:

- Pain and Burning
- Numbness and Tingling
- Skin turns hard and white
- Skin starts to peel or get blisters and itch
- Skin gets firm, shiny, and grayish-yellow

To help a frostbite victim, get the person to a warm, dry place and remove constrictive clothing. Raise affected areas and apply warm, moist compresses to these areas. Do not rub frostbitten areas or apply direct heat.

Hypothermia is a more severe response to cold exposure that is defined as a significant drop in body core temperature. Symptoms of hypothermia include:

- Cold sensation, goose bumps, confusion, numbness
- Intense shivering, lack of coordination, sluggishness
- Violent shivering, difficulty speaking, mental confusion, stumbling, depression
- Muscle stiffness, slurred speech and trouble seeing
- Unconsciousness

At the first sign of hypothermia take the person to a dry, warm place or warm the victim with blankets, extra dry clothing or your own body heat. To improve your comfort and safety while exercising in the cold, the *American College of Sports Medicine* recommends the following:

- Layer your clothing – they're easy to remove, helping to regulating core temperature
- Cover your head – it accounts for 50% of heat loss
- Cover your mouth – to warm air before you breathe
- Stay Dry (especially your feet) – wet clothing increases body-heat loss
- Stay hydrated – dehydration affects your body's ability to regulate body heat
- Avoid alcohol – it dilates blood vessels and increases heat loss

So just because the temperature drops a few degrees, that's no reason to give up on outdoor activity and exercise, just be cautious and follow these simple steps. As always, if you have any questions please contact your primary healthcare provider.

Mike DeCinti is the marketing director for Lumberton Radiological Associates. He can be reached at mdecinti@lraxray.com or by calling 738-8222, ext. 258.