

Cold weather exercise by Mike DeCinti

Well it was going to happen sooner or later, and this weekend it started. I had to start planning out what I was going to wear during my workouts now that the temperatures are dropping. Saturday on my bike ride, I was a bit under-prepared. But then for my run on Sunday, I was probably over dressed.

When it's warm outside it's easy. Grab your shorts and a top (which is optional on those hot days) and get outside and start exercising. But when the cold rolls in, you have to start thinking about staying warm, but not overheating. This leads to a lot of questions. Which top should I grab? Should I wear pants? How about gloves? Most people say that it is better to start out a bit cold then to finish too hot. But that saying doesn't really make you feel any better when your riding your bike around 20mph in 40-degree temperatures and your fingers and ears feel like they're beginning to freeze. Of course if you over dress for the situation, by the end of your workout you may become overheated, which can cause a whole host of different problems.

You see it's a bit of trial and error when it comes to dressing for exercise in the cold. Experience will help you become better prepared, but until then don't get nervous, just follow some of these simple guidelines and most important be ready to adapt. The last thing you want to do is let the cold weather keep you from exercising, because if you do your only clothing question will be if they come in a larger size.

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 it's 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.

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