



Heart-Healthy Tips: Stay Active with Winter Walking

The idea of walking for fitness doesn't need to be stored away with your summer clothes! When weather permits, there are many benefits to getting outside and walking for exercise in the winter:

- ▶ Lifts spirits. Daily exposure to winter sunlight has been shown to improve seasonal depression. Because we stay inside more in the winter we have less exposure to light which can affect our mood greatly. Just getting outside might improve your mood if you are feeling a little down.
- ▶ Increases motivation. No matter what the weather, if you walk outdoors you are more likely to finish your exercise goal for the day because you have to get back to your starting point. If stay inside to walk on a treadmill, it's much easier to push the stop button if you get bored.
- ▶ Burns calories. You won't burn more calories walking in the winter versus on warm days, but if you walk in the snow you will expend more energy and therefore burn more calories. Just be careful of icy patches!
- ▶ Improves energy. Winter is a beautiful time to walk and it's a wonderful time to enjoy the peace of nature since the snow absorbs noise. Winter walking can be exhilarating and enjoyable as long as you are dressed right for the weather.

Tips for winter walking safety:

- ▶ Stretch and warm up your muscles inside before you dress for the outdoors.
- ▶ Dress appropriately for your climate; make sure and bundle up, wear shoes with non-slip soles, and wear reflective and/or bright clothing.
- ▶ Warm up longer at a moderate pace before switching to your fast pace.
- ▶ Remove layers as you warm up.
- ▶ You will warm up more than you think you will while walking - plan how you will carry layers that you remove.
- ▶ If it is windy, try to arrange your route into the wind outbound and return with the wind at your back.
- ▶ If the sidewalks and walkways are impassable and you have to walk in the street, walk against traffic and as close to the curb as you can.
- ▶ Snow that has accumulated into drifts can muffle the sounds of approaching motor vehicles, and hats and scarves that cover your ears can muffle or even block these sounds. Stay alert.
- ▶ Wear lip balm and sunscreen to protect skin and lips.
- ▶ Drink eight ounces of water every 15-30 minutes while walking.
- ▶ If it is too cold or storms prevent walking outdoors, try an indoor walking option.

Source: Dakota County (MN) Government

Find more health and wellness tips and resources for first responders at www.healthy-firefighter.org.