

Cold, cold, go away: How to stay active in chilly weather

Fall and winter mean picturesque, snowy scenery. But the season's weather can make working out more difficult. Normally dry sidewalks are replaced with ice. Or you may be snowed in entirely and unable to get to the gym.

It's important to exercise year-round for your physical and mental health. Clare Spires, an exercise physiologist at OSF HealthCare, has some tips to stay active in the winter.

- Before you even pick up a weight or lace up the running shoes, set standards for yourself.

"Even if you can just make the goal to do *something* that day," Spires says. "It doesn't need to be an hour or hour-and-a-half workout. It can be 30 or 45 minutes. It can be at home, at a gym or outside. But just making those goals possible and achievable."

- Workout in the daylight. This can give you a mood boost and, if you're outside, ensure you have enough light to be safe. Try working out on your lunch break or just when you have 20 minutes to spare, Spires suggests.
- If the outdoors is not nasty (like a blizzard), a walk or run outside is doable, Spires says. Just keep your safety in mind.

"Check the weather forecast. Use shoes that have more traction for those slippery sidewalks. Stay hydrated. Dress appropriately," Spires advises.

Proper attire includes layers of sweat-wicking fabrics, and gloves and hats to warm your hands and head. Also, have a safety plan that includes access to first aid and a phone. Workout with a buddy when you can.

Also, know your limits. Spires says if you wouldn't go to the gym for two hours, don't shovel snow for two hours. Do it in five-to-10-minute chunks.

"We also use something called the rate of perceived exertion (RPE) scale," Spires explains. "It's one to 10. Ten would be the hardest exercise you've ever done. One is just sitting on the couch. We ideally like people to stay in that four to six moderate intensity range. So, if you think shoveling snow is in the four to six range and not creeping up to an eight or nine, that would be appropriate for you to do."

On the positive side, Spires adds that depending on your location, you can branch out and try workouts like snowshoeing, ice skating or sledding.

"It's fun to try new hobbies that are going to get you more active," Spires says.

- When snowed in and working out in your home, use your surroundings to your advantage. For example, Spires suggests going up and down the stairs a few times with breaks in between.

"You can do different body weight exercises like jumping jacks or squats," Spires adds. "You can get creative and use soup cans, water bottles or even bottles of hairspray to add a little bit of weight or intensity to your workout."

Just like working out outside, Spires says to be aware of your surroundings. Am I on carpet or hardwood, which may be slick? Is there a stray cord or a wandering child I could trip on? Is there a counter or dresser nearby for me to catch my balance?

Read more about how to keep your body in top shape on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).