

Stay Safe During Cold Weather Workouts

The Midwest is getting hit with a blast of icy, cold weather. It may seem like a great time to hunker down indoors, but getting outdoor activity in, even in the cold months, certainly has its benefits.

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Glenett Barrett, APRN, OSF HealthCare Orthopedics

“We need to get outside and get our vitamin D from the sun. It also helps with winter blues and gets us closer to nature. So I always recommend people to try to walk, or if they run to go outside at least once or twice a week if they can manage that, and if the weather is okay for that, too.”

But according to Barrett, she sees plenty of sprains and strains caused by cold weather activities, and the key to a successful wintertime workout is preparation. She warns that in cold temperatures our muscles and connective tissues aren't as elastic, and an indoor warmup is necessary before stepping out into the elements.

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“What you should do before you go out is to do some dynamic warmups. So what I mean by that is if you're a runner, you want to do some running in place, you want to do some lunging, you want to pump your arms, and do that for about ten minutes before you go out.” (:17)

After a workout, Barrett recommends static stretching, which means holding a stretch in place for a period of time, up to 45 seconds.

Warming your muscles isn't the only thing to consider. Barrett says outdoor activity that results in sweat can also put someone in danger of hypothermia. She recommends dressing in layers, and wearing synthetic materials that will wick moisture away from your body, unlike cotton, which absorbs moisture.

Barrett also says paying attention to the terrain can help you avoid a visit to her office. Runners, walkers and bikers are advised to use their best judgement. If it's too icy, it's time to stay inside.

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“When it's icy out. If you don't have a good trail, or a good place that you know is salted and cleared off, then you shouldn't go out and walk or run in it, unless of course you are an experienced runner outside with maybe some traction for your tennis shoes.” (:16)

And even if cold weather workouts aren't your thing, there is a good chance old man winter will force your hand when it's time to clear the driveway. Barrett says the rules remain the same for shoveling. Don't start on the snow before stretching.

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“The thing about people who go out and just shovel and who don't exercise regularly, and I see this all the time in my office, is they'll get a strain of their back or their legs. They really need to also stretch and do a little exercise before going out to do their shoveling.” (:19)

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