

Unpacking Those Holiday Pounds

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As winter weather approaches and the holidays are just around the corner exercise and sensible eating often take a back seat to the food and family activities. But those holiday pounds don't have to add up. Try to incorporate a few healthy changes into your winter routine. Exercise and portion control are key elements to not adding on extra pounds and keeping up your exercise routine in cold weather can offer many rewards.

Exercise increases energy and boosts the immune system. A recent study by the Mayo Clinic reported that moderate exercisers get 20-30 percent fewer colds than non-exercisers. And, you won't have to be a slave to the treadmill in the spring to lose the extra pounds.

For some, winter exercise means staying indoors and using a stationary bike, elliptical or treadmill, but if you prefer variety these options may get boring. With the correct clothes and a little planning, outdoor exercise can be safe, effective and even fun. The following tips will make exercising outside this winter safe and rewarding:

1. **Dress in Layers.** One mistake people make is to dress too warm. Exercise generates a lot of heat, and often sweat, followed by the chills when you slow down. The solution is to dress in layers then remove them when you start to sweat and add layers as you cool down. The first layer should be a thin synthetic material that will not stay wet against your skin. Next, add a layer of fleece or poly-cotton blend. Finally, use a waterproof or wind-resistance outer layer. Remember, heavier coats and insulated vests will cause you to get too hot. If it is extremely cold or if you have asthma, wear a face mask or a scarf over your mouth.
2. **Wear appropriate gear.** Always wear reflective clothing such as shoes and warm-ups that have reflective strips. In addition, wear footwear with enough traction for the surface and avoid walking or running on ice.
3. **Cover your head and neck.** Heat is lost through the head and neck. Wear a beanie, cap, turtle neck and or scarf. Remember, you can always remove layers like gloves, hats and scarves if you start sweating.
4. **Drink plenty of fluids.** Drink water or sports drinks before, during and after a workout even if you are not thirsty. You can become just as dehydrated in the cold as in the heat.
5. **Know the signs of frostbite and hypothermia.** Frostbite is most common on the face, fingers and toes. Symptoms include paleness, numbness, loss of feeling, or a stinging or burning sensation. If you suspect frostbite, get out of the cold immediately and slowly warm the affected area without rubbing. If numbness continues, seek emergency care. Hypothermia is characterized by intense shivering, slurred speech, loss of coordination and fatigue and requires immediate emergency attention.

Always consult your doctor before starting an exercise program, especially if you have health concerns. If properly prepared, exercising outdoors in the winter is a great alternative and can help you knock off those extra holiday pounds. For more tips contact a wellness coach with Physical Therapy Specialists Clinic's Wellness & Prevention Program at 800-695-5899.