

The York University Staff Association Health & Wellness News & Views

The weather outside may be frightful, but the many health benefits of going outside for a walk are most delightful. When the mercury plummets and the snow starts to fall, even the most dedicated walker can be tempted to hibernate. "It's too cold." "It's too hot." "It's raining." Weather related excuses are some of the most common reasons that walkers don't walk. Take the steps (pun totally intended) to ensure you can stick with your usual exercise routine regardless of the season. Just because it is cold outside does not mean your walking routine has to come to a temporary freeze. Its time to embrace the wonderful weather that comes with being Canadian. (Or at least laugh in its face) Once you know how to walk in the cold, it becomes easier and more comfortable to get walking. If you know the benefits, wear the right fabrics, dress in layers, and walk at the right time, along with a bit of caution and common sense - you will manage winters greatest hazards and keep moving all season long.

A key to staying warm when you're walking in the cold temps is to stay dry, and that's exactly what layering help you achieve. By removing layer by layer as you warm up, you will avoid excessive sweating, which can lead to chills. Be smart about fabrics. Leave that old University sweatshirt in your closet and treat yourself to something new. High tech fabrics make a big difference in comfort, they are well worth the investment. An inner layer made of synthetic fabric to wick away sweat so you stay dry, a middle layer of fleece for insulation and a windproof water resistance outer layer is essential for cold weather walking.

Change up your kicks! You are looking for a shoe that is trail ready Usually winterized with materials like Gore-Tex, containing both an inner and outer layer with extra traction in the form of good lugs, cleats, or even small spikes. These help you get a grip on slippery surfaces. Ski poles or trekking poles can also provide extra stability as well as a cardio burst.

Getting frostbite isn't fun at anytime especially when you exercise. Be sure to cover your feet, hands, face, and head. Mittens tend to be better for hands especially in frigid temperatures. However, if you don't like wearing mittens because they make it harder to do things like access your phone or play your tunes, many insulated gloves have electronic friendly fingers. Covering your head helps keep your whole body warm. Some features to look for include a hat with ear flaps and a small bill to shade your face on sunny days and keep precipitation out of your face on the gloomier ones. Choose a loose scarf or face mask to prevent the sting of icy cold air when you inhale. This can be especially important if you have asthma or heart problems.



Catch up with a friend and take a walking buddy for extra laughs and precaution. Two sets of eyes and ears allows for increased safety. Walking is an enjoyable venture that often leaves us "in the zone" not paying attention to the often-rugged ground, with ice patches, puddles, and that dreaded yellow snow. As the December holidays roll in, go for a stroll around neighborhoods to see the homes and yards decorated with festive lights and displays. Make a standing date, block a time dedicated to walk with a friend. If you cannot meet in person, commit to call while you step along your walking route. After all accountability helps keep us stay committed.

There is something to be said about catching some rays, even when the sun is peeking through bare tree branches or reflecting off of freshly fallen snow. Winter walking is not only enjoyable, but more and more studies are confirming what we all instinctively know as Canadians: that exposure to sun in the winter is vital and necessary to ward off winter depression. Getting active in the winter cold often causes the brain to release more of these substances, which accounts for the smile you see on the face of anyone making a snowman or stock-piling snowballs inside a snow fort.

Finally, we all know that there are major benefits to walking. Walking is a gentle activity that improves endurance, helps to boost the capacity of your heart, and when it's cold, the body seeks to maintain its internal temperature at a constant level of about 37°C, by increasing the flow of blood. The heart will therefore pump more quickly and become stronger. Walking outside in the Winter also helps improve your mood and boost your energy. It gets your blood pumping; and gives you a chance to connect with nature. Enjoy your very own personal Winter wonderland. Listen to icy tree branches tingling in the breeze or look for animal tracks in the fresh fluffy snow. Mother Nature's most spectacular artwork. Use your winter walks as an opportunity to embrace the soundscape, take deep breaths, and feel the fresh air entering your lungs as you slowly exhale, notice the tension melting away like the snow in the sun.

Winter, along with death and taxes, is an inevitable and unavoidable reality for people who choose to live in Canada, so you might as well embrace it. And all of the benefits of doing just that!

No matter what your wintertime activity level, be extra cautious. Stretch first and warm up – your muscles and the rest of your body. And pace yourself. Your body may respond differently to exertion in cold weather. If you have not done any physical activity in a while, it's a good idea to check with your doctor before starting any winter workout.