



Exercising in a Winter Wonderland

By Teri Brown

The wind is whipping, the snow is blowing and you and your family feel stuck in the house. How can you get a decent workout in the wintertime when you are sick of the gym and intimidated by the cold?

Stacy Berman, certified fitness instructor and founder of Stacy's Boot Camp, a back to basics alternative to the traditional gym, believes many people just hibernate in the winter instead of taking advantage of the natural opportunities the season presents.

"People often don't think about exercising outside in the winter time because it is so much easier to cuddle up with a cup of hot cocoa and watch your favorite movie than it is to plan and get motivated enough to endure the cold weather," Berman says. "If you already have motivational problems with exercising, the cold becomes just another excuse."

Cold-weather Options

Exercising in the winter can be a blast, especially when done as a family. One idea is a brisk walk through your favorite park. It gives your children a much different view of a place they thought they knew well and you generally have the place to yourself! Berman says there are many activities that can only be done in the winter such as skiing, snowboarding, building a snowman, having a snowball fight and sledding.

"Although you don't typically think of these as exercises, your muscles are working and your heart rate elevates, and what's more enjoyable than having a snowball fight with your family on a Sunday afternoon?" Berman says.

Be Prepared

The key to working out safely in the wintertime is preparation. Berman says exercise can absolutely be done safely outside in the winter if you keep a few factors in mind.

"In the winter months, warming the muscles up is essential prior to engaging in outdoor activities because it will help make the muscles more elastic and reduce the risk of injury," Berman says.

"Make sure you and your children are wearing proper clothing. Layering is great because once you start heating up you can take something off. Also, wear fabrics that pull the moisture away from the body."

Berman says it's also important to let your body get used to the climate change. Don't expect to be able to perform to the same intensity you would in warmer temperatures right away.

"Take your time and slowly progress until you are able to work up to that point," Berman says. "Also, make sure you drink lots of fluids. Although you may not feel as thirsty, you are still losing water and need to keep hydrated."

So if you want to keep your family active in the winter, take it outside. The following winter workouts will help keep your family in shape, the fun way!

Sledding

This is a fabulous family activity that promotes fitness and fun. Try the following variations on the walk up the hill to get the most out of your workout.

Turn to the side. Stand with your feet about shoulder width apart. Holding the sled in one hand, walk sideways, with your legs moving across one another in a scissor-like motion, up the hill. Remember to alternate legs, one leg in front of the other, all the way up the hill.

Walk up the hill backwards. This works a whole different set of muscles than the scissor walk or conventional forward walk.

The Snow Shoe Shuffle

Snowshoeing can be an excellent cardio sport on its own, but you can get an extra kick by doing the following snowshoe exercises! Do these after you have been snowshoeing for a bit so your muscles are limber and warm, but don't wait too long or fatigue may have set in, increasing your chance of injury!

Stand with your feet roughly shoulder width apart. Look straight forward and place both arms in front of you. Slowly bend down until your hamstrings touch your calves. Push off of your heels and raise yourself back up to the starting position. Repeat.

Stand in front of a tree and hold on to it with both hands. Slowly slide your foot back and lift your leg off the ground, right behind you. You will feel your buttocks take over and sustain the leg as it travels through space; you will feel the work primarily in the upper part of the butt. Lower the leg back to the start position and repeat. Try not to swing the leg back and forth.

Stretching Like a Figure Skater

Lisa Knoerl is a figure skating coach and the director of the figure skating program at the Sherwood Ice Arena in Sherwood, Ore. She is used to working out in chilly temperatures and believes ice skating is a wonderful way for families to exercise together. She gives the following tips to get a workout while on the ice.

Ice skating is a wonderful cardio workout that also strengthens the leg muscles. To keep from getting sore later, it is important to stretch several times during your session. This can be done right on the ice! (Most rinks have a waist-high wall or railing to grab onto. If not, do this off ice!) Remember, the exercises are to be done once the entire family is competent and comfortable on the ice (i.e. skating easily away from the wall and the ability to stop safely).

This is similar to a wall stretch that you do before a run. Grab the wall on the side of the ice with both hands. Put one leg behind you and bend the leg closest to the wall while pressing the heel of the other leg to the ice. Move hips slightly forward. Don't bounce. Stretch the muscle and return to your starting position. Do five times and repeat with your other leg.

Grab onto the wall with both hands. Place leg onto wall while the other is positioned with your foot to the wall, leaving enough space for your knee to bend in slightly. Bend the knee you are standing on toward the wall, stretching the thigh and calf muscles of the raised leg. Remember to keep your buttocks pulled in and do not bend at the waist. Do five times and repeat with the other leg.