

Winter Recreation



Go Snowshoeing

Snowshoeing is a great, low-impact winter exercise that, for you hikers and runners, can extend your exercise season long after the snow arrives.

It's also a great social activity, outdoor retailer REI says, suitable for all ages and ability levels.

WHAT YOU NEED

Snowshoeing is an inexpensive winter sport, especially when compared to other sports such as skiing and snowboarding. Required gear, the retailer says, include snow shoes, of course, and weather appropriate attire. You can also use poles, just like with hiking, but they're not required. You can even rent snowshoes and poles in some locations so that you can try before you buy.

Snowshoes come in three types, REI says, those for flat terrain, those for rolling terrain and those for mountain terrain. Know where you're going to go before you choose what kind of snowshoes to get.

Flat terrain shoes are generally less expensive and have a simple binding system with modest traction and no heel lifts. Rolling terrain shoes are moderately priced with somewhat aggressive crampons for traction. They are sturdy with



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an easily adjusted binding system and a heel lift in many styles. Mountain terrain shoes are designed to handle steep or icy terrain. They tend to be more expensive and feature an aggressive crampon system for traction with a sophisticated binding system that can accept larger boots. They may also include

heel lifts to help you handle steep slopes.

WHAT ELSE?

You'll also need warm, waterproof boots. Dress in layers of clothing that can stand up to cold, wet conditions. Other things you may want to bring for an outdoor activity are, according to REI:

- Navigation aids, such as a map, compass, GPS device, altimeter and personal locator beacon.

- A headlamp and extra batteries.
- Sun protection (yes, even in winter) such as sunglasses and sunscreen.
- A first aid kit.
- A knife and gear repair kit.

- Things for making a fire, such as matches, a lighter, tinder and more.

- Shelter, even a light emergency one, in case you get stuck.
- Extra food, more than you think you need.
- Extra water, also more than you think you need.
- And extra clothing.

Go Pitch a Tent

Winter in many parts of the country doesn't mean howling winds and blowing snow. In many parts of the south and west, the weather can be cool and sunny — perfect for camping.

Because many state parks and campgrounds are more popular during the summer vacation months, it could be an inexpensive way to visit a new area.

CHOOSING A TENT

KOA knows a thing or two about pitching tents. The campground company says that, before you go out and buy a tent, there are some things to consider. First of all, most tents are easy enough to put up for a beginner, but they may not be easy for people with physical limitations or who may be uncomfortable sleeping on the ground.

You should also consider the weather and the fact that tents are pretty spartan. There's no climate control. There are tent heaters, but they require your full attention to safety while they're on. KOA says they're not ideal for all camping environments.

SHOPPING FOR YOUR TENT

As far as purchasing a tent,



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KOA suggests picking a tent that has 30 square feet of space for every person in your group.

If you've got a larger family, look at tents with partitions you can zip up for children or others who may want a separate space.

Tents come in two shapes, cabin-style and dome. Cabin-style tents are very comfortable for families or taller peo-

ple, as their straight walls make them easy to stand up in. But those straight walls can make them vulnerable in tough weather.

Dome style tents stand up better in high winds and, because they're smaller in general and use less material, they can be lighter for packing in and out of a campground. This is useful if you're hiking to your campsite.

LOOK FOR A VESTIBULE

Vestibules are a type of extension that works as a sort of mudroom for your tent during we weather. They can also be a shaded porch for your family to relax in. Some vestibules are just overhead protection while others have walls or a floor extension as well. Shop around if this sounds like something you could use.

OTHER TYPES OF CAMPING

If tent camping sounds too primitive or like too much work, there are other options out there. Look for state parks and campgrounds that offer cabins or even RVs for rent. It may be a little pricier, but these options generally come with electricity and running water, two things even the best tents can't provide.

Cold Weather Tips

Going walking in a winter wonderland sounds like a magical experience, but all that wintry weather comes with wintry temperatures, too.

Cold weather can be just as deadly as summer's heat if you're not careful.

FROSTBITE

One of the dangers of winter's chill is frostbite, a condition where the body's survival mechanisms kick in, drawing blood away from your extremities and toward your vital organs. This leaves things such as your ear tips, fingers and toes vulnerable to freezing. It can happen in minutes, the National Weather Service says, especially in extreme cold.

The best way to avoid frostbite is to stay inside during the worst of the cold weather.

If you must go out, dress in layers and cover as much skin as you can. If you get wet, change into dry clothing as soon as you can. Keep your skin dry and stay out of the wind. You should also stay hydrated, since that increases your blood volume, making frostbite less likely to happen. Avoid caffeine — it constricts blood vessels — and alcohol, which reduces shivering, an important mechanism your body uses to stay warm.

If you suspect frostbite, get



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indoors as soon as you can. Don't rub or massage cold body parts. Instead, put your hands in your armpits, hold onto a warm person or animal and drink warm fluids. Put on extra layers of clothes or blankets and remove rings, watches or any other tight jewelry.

Once inside, the NWS says to get in a warm bath and wrap your face and ears in a warm, moist towel. Make sure the water isn't too hot. Frostbitten skin will be red and swollen and feel like it's

on fire. You may also blister, but don't break the blisters. If the skin is blue or gray, is very swollen or blistered, or feels hard and numb, go to the hospital.

HYPOTHERMIA

When your body temperature drops below 96 degrees, you've reached hypothermia. This is a serious health condition that can cause death. Believe it or not, the NWS says hypothermia can occur in temperatures as high as 60

degrees, particularly if you're in water or not dressed properly for the weather. The NWS says to prevent hypothermia:

- Dress in layers and wrap up well when going outside in the cold.

- Avoid breezes and drafts.

- Eat warm foods and drinks to keep your body temperature up.

Elderly people are especially prone to hypothermia. Some medicines, problems with circulation and certain illnesses may affect your ability to

resist hypothermia. Also, older people tend not to shiver effectively, meaning it's harder for them to stay warm. During cold weather, you should check on the older people around you often.

If you suspect hypothermia, call an ambulance or go to the nearest ER. Then, like close to the person affected and cover both of you with thick blankets. The hotter you are, the NWS says, the hotter you can make the patient. Don't rub them or handle them roughly.

Hit the Sledding Slopes Safely

For families and children, seeing those pristine white hills of snow is too much. They have to slide down them.

Sledding is a great winter pastime, but it can also cause some serious injuries. Here are some tips for sledding safely from Nemours KidsHealth and Dr. Amy W. Anzilotti.

GET THE RIGHT GEAR

Safe sledding starts with the right gear. This means choosing a safe sled — one with brakes and steering. And wear a helmet. In a pinch, any sports helmet will work. Think a batting helmet or a bike helmet. Since sledding is an outdoor sport, you also need to dress for the occasion. Layer up and pick clothes that can stand up to both the wet and the cold. Skip the scarf, Dr. Anzilotti says, because the trailing fabric can get caught in the sled.

GET THE RIGHT HILL

Look for a sledding hill that's not too steep and has a long, flat area at the bottom so you can glide to a stop. Skip the hills that end near a street or parking lot to keep you from getting hit by a car. You should also avoid hills that end near ponds, trees, fences, walls or other hazards. Walk the slope and make sure it's smooth and free of rocks,



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poles and trees. Go sledding during the day; at night, it may be too dark to see hazards.

SLED SAFETY

Once you've got your gear and your hill, it's time to shred

some snow. Make sure there's a responsible adult with your group and that children under the age of 5 sled only with an adult. Everyone should sit face-forward with their feet pointing downhill. Don't go down face-first because you

can get a serious head injury, and never stand on a sled. Go down the hill one at a time and with only one person per sled, except for adults sledding with young children.

Keep your arms and legs inside the sled at all times and

don't build a jump. It won't work and you'll end up on YouTube, in the hospital or worse. If you get caught on a runaway sled, roll off of it. Don't be tempted to pull a sled with an ATV or other vehicle. See above about the hospital.

Fat Biking in Snow

You've probably seen bikes around town with wide tires. Really wide, like 4 or 5 inches wide. These are fat bikes, and they can, in the right hands, glide across snow and even sand easily.

Fat bikes can keep you cycling when the weather would otherwise relegate your bike to the garage. Here's how.

LOW TIRE PRESSURE

This, along with the wide tires, is what makes the magic behind the fat bike. You'll need to experiment with your tires' PSI to get the right sensation — Bicycling.com calls it floating — and the most efficiency. For snow, its experts suggest between five and eight PSI. On general trails, look for more like eight to 12 PSI.

"In a race or on a ride, the snow conditions can change dramatically," 2016 and 2019 women's fat bike world champion Amy Beisel told Bicycling.com. "Don't be afraid to play with your tire pressure until you really understand what increasing it or decreasing it a pound or two will do."

IT'S A GREAT WORKOUT

Fat biking can also be a great workout thanks to that floating ride. You can burn up



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to 1,500 calories an hour, Bicycling.com says, but you recover more quickly.

"Because it's not weight-bearing, the recovery time is less despite the balance and core strength it requires," said Andrew Gardiner, the former head

Nordic ski coach for Middlebury College.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

When you're hitting the fat biking trail, remember to dress for the colder weather. While some companies are beginning to offer fat bike

apparel, Bicycling.com says it's probably going to be up to you to come up with your own kit.

Start with cold weather gear similar to what you'd wear for skiing. Grab a pair or two of gloves, earmuffs, goggles and extras of everything to keep

yourself dry and warm. If you're sporting cycling shoes, wear booties over them. If you have flat pedals, your winter boots may work just as well, or you can grab insulated bike shoes. You can swap your bike helmet for a ski helmet if it's really cold out.

Hit the Gym — At Home

Some days, the weather may be too frightful to get out and work out. But that doesn't mean it's time to lay on the couch and sip cocoa.

Here are some new fitness routines you can try out in the comfort of your own home.

YOGA

Yoga is an exercise routine that can improve balance, strength and flexibility, Johns Hopkins says. The slow movements and deep breathing done during each pose can increase blood flow and warm your muscles while building strength. In fact, the American College of Physicians recommends yoga as a first-line treatment for things like lower back pain and it can also ease arthritis symptoms. The calming exercise can also increase your mental and physical energy, giving you a boost in alertness and lowering your stress.

PILATES

Pilates is a physical fitness system developed in the early 1900s by Joseph Pilates. It uses controlled movements to improve flexibility, build strength and help you develop control and endurance. It puts an emphasis on core muscles in the abdomen, low back and hips. It focuses on muscle tone, not building muscle, the Cleveland Clinic



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said, and while it does sometimes need special equipment, it can be done easily on a mat or blanket.

HIIT

HIIT stands for high-intensity interval training. That's a kind of workout that alternates

between intense bursts of activity and short-term rest or lower-intensity activity. The YMCA says HIIT workouts are intense but efficient, and that research has shown a 15-minute interval circuit can give you a better workout than jogging on a treadmill for an hour. The

high-intensity part of the exercise can include running, biking, jump roping or rowing, high knees, jumping jacks or skipping rope. Anything that gets your heart rate up fast.

One thing all these routines have in common is that they're bodyweight exercises, meaning

they use your body's own weight instead of specialized equipment such as dumbbells and kettlebells. But you can use bodyweight exercises to workout nearly every part of your body to get ready for warmer weather and keep your fitness up during the short, gray days.

Olympic Sports to Try at Home

The Winter Olympics next take to the slopes in Beijing in 2022. The Winter Olympics are great because they shine a much deserved light on winter sports we may not often get to see on our television screens.

These include some sports you can try right at home. Keep reading for more information and to get playing.

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

Cross-country made its Olympic debut in Chamonix in 1924. Marit Bjorgen of Norway holds the most gold medals. It's the oldest type of skiing and came from a need to travel over snow-covered terrain. Unlike other skiing sports, such as downhill, cross-country asks the athlete to ski over mostly flat terrain, though going up and down hills isn't uncommon. Think of it as cross-country running, on skis.

There are two main techniques in cross-country skiing: skate and classic. The classic technique is considered easier to learn, according to experts at the Austrian ski resort of Tirol. It's based on a diagonal step, meaning your left arm and pole are held out in front of your body while your right arm and pole



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are behind. You switch from left to right, keeping your hands and feet diagonally opposed.

Skating looks more like ice skating. Skiers push off on one ski and glide on the other, using the poles for added impetus. This is harder work than classic cross-country technique, but you can go faster and it's easier to tackle steep trails and inclines.

If you're just starting out, consider renting your gear and taking a few lessons to get you started.

CURLING

Curling also made its Olympic debut in Chamonix in 1924. It's a team sport played by two teams of four players on a rectangle of ice. You'll need a 44-pound rock — the Olympians use rocks made from a rare, dense granite quarried on Scotland's Ailsa Craig. Shoes should grip the ice and you can get Teflon pads to use while shooting and skimming over the ice. Finally, the last thing you'll need is a curling broom. Sweeping the ice as the rock

travels causes it to turn, speed up or slow down as the game demands. The most common kinds is a brush or push broom, but a Canadian broom, which looks more like a normal house broom, can also be used.

A curling match consists of 10 ends, similar to innings in baseball. In each end, the players on a team alternate throwing stones. To shoot, a player pushes a foot off a starting block (hack) and slides across the tie to the hog line and releases the stone

toward the house, an area opposite the player with four concentric circles. The team with the most stones closest to the house bullseye, the button, is awarded points.

Teams during their turn are not only trying to get close to the button, but also try to move the other team's stones away from it. The team with the most stones closest to the button is awarded points. The team that doesn't score gets to throw the last rock of the next end. The team with the most points after 10 ends wins.