

Winter Recreation GUIDE





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General Snow Safety

There's snow on the ground! Does that mean you're staying inside for the next three months? With a little preparation and outdoor smarts, you can play outside as much as you want during the winter.

While there are all sorts of snow sports ranging from high-intensity downhill skiing to a snowshoe hike at your own pace, the U.S. Forest Service suggested certain things to do anytime you're spending time outside in the cold to have a safe, fun day.

MAKE SURE THERE'S ENOUGH SNOW

Tubing or skiing on half-frozen or half-snow-covered hills is not fun or good for the environmental underneath the

snow; it also can be dangerous without sufficient snowpack to protect fallers from rocks and hard dirt. Stay away from areas that don't have adequate snow cover

KNOW WHAT AREAS ARE DESIGNATED FOR WHICH ACTIVITY

Not all trails are designated for every recreational activity, even when they're covered with snow. Whichever activity you're doing, make sure you're going to the right place to do it. This

protects not only the terrain, but also keeps people safe and ensures a snowmobiler isn't going to unexpectedly come upon a group of snowshoers.

Also make sure the trails you want to use are open.

PAY ATTENTION TO AVALANCHE WARNINGS

Avalanches can happen quickly and be fatal. Avoid traveling in areas that are avalanche-prone, but even if there are no warnings for the area you're in, be aware of your sur-

roundings. Avoid steep slopes, gullies or depression and watch for unstable snowpack. If you are out in less traveled area, have an avalanche transceiver, shovel and probe at all times.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY AND WATCH OUT FOR FROSTBITE

Wear gloves, a hat, a heavy coat, insulated pants, warm socks and shoes that keep your feet dry. Dress in layers; you don't want to get too hot and

start sweating, as wet clothes can lead to hypothermia. Watch for signs of frostbite, such as numbness, white or grayish-yellow skin or skin that feels firm or waxy. When you suspect frostbite, get the person into a warm area right away, immerse the affected area in warm — not hot — water, or use body heat, such as sticking frozen fingers under the armpit. Don't rub the area or use a heating pad or other warming device, as the numb area can easily burn.

Snowshoeing

If you can walk, you can hike, and if you can hike, you can strap on clunky snowshoes and do a little winter hiking. It's low impact, low entry and it allows you to go at your pace without the fear of skiers whizzing past you. It still takes some work and preparation, but if you're looking for a fun way to get outdoors this winter, look no further than your local trails.

According to Snowshoe Magazine, this sport (or art) has been around for thousands of years, although prior to the last few decades it was more of a survival technique than a Saturday hobby. Grab a pair of snowshoes and be part of the fastest-growing winter sport in the world.

WHAT DO I LOOK FOR IN SNOWSHOES?

According to Snowshoe Magazine, recreational hiking snowshoes are great for beginners; they work best on simple terrain without steep climbing or steep descents. Aerobic or fitness snowshoes are great for active snowshoers; they have a sleek design and are harder than recreation snowshoes. Hiking or backpacking snowshoes are good for people who are in the powder; they're tough, with a strong aluminum frame, they're made with durable material for flotation and bindings that support many types of boots.

Snowshoes usually range from \$100 to \$300. If you're a beginner, consider renting the first couple of times to get a feel for what you like.

HOW MUCH SHOULD I EAT?

Lots! Depending on your speed and the terrain, snowshoeing can burn up to 600 calories an hour — more than



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45 percent more than walking or running at the same speed. To have enough energy to get back to the car, make sure you eat before you leave and bring snacks for the journey; trail mix, jerky, nuts, a peanut but-

ter and jelly sandwiches or other snacks that have a mix of protein and carbohydrates will do the trick.

Don't forget to hydrate while you're snowshoeing. Take lots of water and a sports

drink or something with electrolytes, particularly if you're going out for several hours.

FIGURE OUT WHERE YOU'RE GOING

The USDA warned snow-

shoers away from established ski tracks. Stick to the trails that are designated for hiking and snowshoeing and make sure the trails are open. You may need a trail pass as well. Check with local authorities.

Cross-Country and Downhill

Whether you're speeding down an icy slope before executing a perfect stop at the bottom, taking on the bunny slopes with careful "S" moves or exploring the terrain on cross-country skis, strapping two pieces of wood to your feet is a great way to spend a winter day. If you've never been, don't be afraid to give skiing a try.

DOWNHILL SKIING

Downhill skiing provides an adrenaline rush every time you make it down a hill, but if you've never been before, you may spend a lot of time in the snow instead of sliding down. The Adventure Sports Network offered a number of ways to make skiing more fun, such as finding your favorite lift and getting used to it and figuring out what trails you like. Most ski resorts label the ski runs by difficulty; avoid black diamond runs until you are very confident in your ability.

There are some down sides to downhill skiing, though. It's more expensive; you have to rent skis and boots and buy a lift ticket. You may also want to pay for a lesson or two if you're brand new to the sport; there are tricks to stopping, slowing and controlling your skis in the unwieldy boots.

Sometimes, even putting on the skis or getting up when you fall down (and rest assured you will fall down) can be tricky, and some expert advice can go a long way.

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

For a more relaxed ski trip that allows you to explore the terrain and take you away from the crowds and into nature, give cross-country skiing a try. It is less expensive to rent skis, and the skis and



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boots are significantly more comfortable than downhill skis.

Cross-country skiing also has great health benefits; since

you rely on yourself to get both up and down hills, you can burn more than 1,000 calories an hour while getting a full-body workout and get

your heart rate up, according to Health Fitness Revolution.

Cross-country skiing is also a great sport to do by yourself or with others. Go alone, and

you have time to think and appreciate nature. Go with others and take advantage of the miles of snow-covered trails to chat.

Tubing and Sledding

Tubing is a great winter activity; it doesn't require much expensive special equipment or skills, you don't need an expensive lift ticket and you don't even need a big hill to have a good time. Young and older children can participate and have fun.

However, tubing and sledding don't come without risk, as you would expect when speeding down an icy or snowy hill. According to the UPMC Health Beat, 30 percent of children who are hospitalized from sledding injuries suffered significant head injuries; 10 percent of those children suffered a permanent disability. Every year, more than 20,000 teenagers and children go to the emergency room.

But there's no reason to not go have a great time tubing. Many cities have designated parks or tubing areas; some of these are free, while others have an entry fee. Some winter parks actually include the sled or tube in the cost of entry, so you don't have to worry about bringing your own. If you don't go to a specifically designated sledding area, make sure you're on public property and are sledding in good terrain.

To have a fun, safe day on the hill, follow these simple rules from UPMC:

- Use a sled, disc or tube that's in good condition. Don't use lunch trays or cardboard boxes.
- Wear a helmet.
- Choose a hill specifically designated for sledding and tubing that has a long, flat area at the bottom that allows



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sledders to gradually come to a stop. The hill should be clear of trees, bumps, rocks, poles and other obstacles; do not build an artificial bump either. A bump that causes sledders to go airborne can

seem fun, but landing can hurt.

- Sit facing forward on the sled; this can reduce the chance of head injury.
- Walk up the side of the hill, not up the middle where

sledders are coming down. Injuries happen when sledders and tubers collide on the way down with people walking up.

- As with any outdoor winter activities, tubers and sled-

ders should dress appropriately for the weather as well. Children may be less likely to mention if they're getting cold, so check in and make sure kids aren't experiencing any symptoms of frostbite.

Cold Weather Running

Does the idea of taking your run indoors to the treadmill during the winter make you cringe? Your fitness routine doesn't have to be sidelined during the colder months. A brisk winter run could be just the thing to get your heart pumping.

Running during the winter will involve some tweaks to your normal routine. You'll need to dress warmer, watch out for winter hazards and be careful of making sure your body temperature doesn't go too low.

CLOTHING

Dress, in layers, for temperatures that are 15-20 degrees warmer than the actual temperature outside. You should feel chilly before you begin your run.

Since winter days can be dim, wear reflective or brightly colored clothing to make yourself visible.

If it's very cold, wool socks are a great bet for keeping your toes warm. Cold temperatures take an extra toll on your lungs, so consider wearing a balaclava or ski mask to keep the wind at bay.

SAFETY

You might want to shorten your stride to prevent slips. Keep an eye out for snowbanks, as well as ice and salt that might have been spread on the pavement.

Don't worry about your speed, as conditions might make it impossible to reach your usual clip. If it feels like you're working hard, don't keep pushing just to reach a certain speed. You're probably



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not going to hit a personal record in freezing temperatures.

It's important to stay hydrated during a winter run. You might not feel yourself sweating as much, but you are still losing fluids when your

heart rate is up. Drink water before, during and after your run, even if you don't feel thirsty.

Wear shoes with extra traction to stay safe in winter conditions. If you plan to run on packed snow or ice, you'll

need a special traction device.

WARM UP, COOL DOWN

Experts suggest a longer than usual warm-up before you head outside in the cold. Runners World suggests running up and down some indoor

stairs, using a jump rope or doing a few yoga poses. After your run, it might be tempting to immediately get indoors to warm up, but a cool-down period also is crucial to prevent sudden body temperature changes and muscle injuries.

Build a Bonfire

A bonfire can make for a leisurely evening with good friends and drinks. Winter, of course, is the perfect time to warm up by the fire, and you can even break out the S'mores ingredients for a treat that brings back warm summer memories.

HISTORY

While today bonfires are a great way to relax and socialize, their history is less recreational. The practice of lighting bonfires dates back centuries, when farmers would slaughter animals at the end of the growing season, then convert the carcasses to fertilizer by burning the bones on a fire — or “bone fire.”

In 1605, bonfires were lit to celebrate King James I surviving an attempt on his life, and to this day, Guy Fawkes Night is celebrated in the United Kingdom. According to Merriam-Webster, bonfires also have been held to worship saints, “which ignited the word’s general meaning of an open-air fire around which people gathered and celebrated.”

FANCY OR RUSTIC?

Many a memorable bonfire was thrown together at the last minute. At its most basic, a bonfire requires only wood, kindling, thermoses full of apple cider and family or friends. But a bonfire doesn't have to be an entirely rustic affair. Why not serve a nice meal and craft a warm gourmet concoction? In fact, Martha Stewart offers a full menu on her website for a fancy fireside affair. Her lineup of food and drink includes hot apple cider with ginger, beef stew, garlic



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bread, S'mores cookies and huckleberry cobbler.

STAY SAFE

It's important to keep safety in mind during your bonfire. After all, no one will be making happy memories if the fire gets out of control. These tips from the Isle of Jersey will help you stay safe while building the fire:

- Build the fire away from sheds, fences and trees;

- Check there are no cables, such as telephone wires, above the bonfire;

- Don't build the bonfire too big and make sure the stack is stable and won't collapse outwards or to one side;

- Use only dry material, as damp material will cause more smoke, which could annoy neighbors or be harmful to people with breathing difficulties;

- Only burn non-contaminated wood or plant materials;

- Don't burn any aerosols, tires, canisters or anything containing foam or paint, which can produce toxic fumes or cause containers to explode;

- Remove any garbage from the area around the bonfire so no one is tempted to throw something on to the fire;

- Check the bonfire before lighting it, as piles of garden

waste are sometimes used as a refuge by hibernating wildlife; and

- Don't use fuel or wax to get the fire going, as it may get out of control quickly.

Once the fire is burning, keep a bucket of water or a garden hose nearby in case it gets too large. Never leave the fire unattended, and keep children and pets away. Never throw fireworks into the fire.

Winter Camping

Winter can be a great time to get back to nature. Don't let the cold temperatures turn you off to the winter camping experience. Campgrounds are less crowded, and winter offers great opportunities for wildlife viewing and outdoor sports.

REI offers the following tips for making the most of a cold-weather camping trip:

- Choose a spot that's sheltered from the wind and free of avalanche danger, then prep your tent site by packing down the snow.

- Proper nutrition and hydration will help you stay warm. Make hot, nutritious breakfasts and dinners and enjoy quick snacks and lunches. Be sure to hydrate throughout the day.

- Learn to avoid frostbite and hypothermia.

- To stay warm on a cold night, eat, fill a bottle with hot water or do jumping jacks.

- Empty floor space inside your tent will make it hard to warm up the interior space. Place your backpack and other gear on the floor of your tent for extra insulation.

THE GEAR

You might need some specialized gear for winter camping. At the very least, you will need a sleeping bag rated for cooler temperatures. An insulated sleeping pad can help you retain warmth even better at night. REI recommends taking along a liquid fuel or canister stove. Dressing in three layers — base, middle and outer — will help you stay warm. Don't forget a hat, gloves and socks, as well as goggles and snow boots, if there will be snow.



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REI also recommends keeping electronics warm by storing them in your sleeping bag or a jacket pocket close to your body. Cold temperatures can drain battery power, and you

don't want to get caught without your cell phone, GPS or flashlight.

THE CHALLENGES

Winter camping can defi-

nately be a much more rustic experience than in the summertime. Amenities such as flush toilets and warm showers might not be available in colder months. In areas that see the

highest traffic during the summer, you also might find that local businesses are shuttered for the season. Plan ahead and know which resources will be available during your trip.