



## Play in the Snow

*Being outside during the cold weather can be fun and keep you fit.*

BY LISA DE NIKE

When you were a child, winter's first few snowflakes probably sent you racing outdoors, where you spent hours waging snowball fights with friends and building elaborate forts from drifts of freezing white stuff.

But as you got older, the onset of cold weather undoubtedly found you scrambling the other way: inside, away from the first frigid blasts of wind and into the warm depths of your favorite easy chair. And that's too bad, because outdoor activities are a great way to stay fit during the colder months.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, a half-hour of regular physical activity a day reduces your risk of dying of heart disease, helps control your weight and diminishes your chances of developing colon cancer, diabetes, stroke and high blood pressure.

But the benefits aren't just physical: exercise improves your mood, too. A recent study by doctors at England's Nottingham Trent University found that bodies in motion produce a chemical called serotonin that may explain why exercise helps people suffering from depression.

So it's no wonder that Jay Dyer, director of sports performance at the nationally respected Union Memorial

Sports Medicine Center in Baltimore, Md., recommends getting outside and active during the winter.

"Most people have a fitness goal—losing weight, gaining muscle and so on—and the winter is the best time of year to make progress," Dyer advises. "You have six months before that first trip to the pool, beach or cutting the grass with your shirt off. If you've spent the summer inside a gym on a treadmill, winter can mark a change in your routine. Your lungs will appreciate some fresh air."

So get out into the world of winter with one of the cold weather sports listed below, or find one of your own. Not only will you feel healthier and stronger, but you may even rediscover the childhood thrill you felt as you raced down a hill on your very own sled.

### **Ice skating and ice hockey**

Looking for a fun and inexpensive way to strengthen your muscles and burn some calories? Break out that old pair of figure or hockey skates and head for a nearby pond, lake (frozen, of course) or indoor rink. According to fitness experts, recreational ice skating burns between 250 and 810 calories per hour, and ice hockey consumes between 450 and 1,800 calories an hour. Because skating is such a great all-in-one workout (you would have to use a number of exercise machines at the gym to get the same whole-body workout session,) don't forget to warm up with some stretches and by jogging in place for a few moments beforehand.

### **Skiing and snowboarding**

It's not hard to understand why skiing—both the downhill and cross country varieties—is one of the world's most popular wintertime activities. Though many people don't realize this, downhill (also called Nordic or Alpine) skiing is a demanding sport that helps develop your balance, endurance and muscle tone. In addition, experts tell us that the adrenaline surge that comes as you race down a mountainside activates certain receptors in your nervous system, causing your heart to beat faster and increasing the amount of air coming into your lungs. This causes endorphins—chemicals that make you feel happy—to rush to your brain.

Cross country skiing offers similar benefits, and an enhanced cardiovascular workout, burning between 600 and 900 calories an hour. It's also quite easy to master: most people can learn the "kick and glide" technique (which pulls the skier along the top of the snow) in just a few minutes.

If you're a veteran skier and want to try something new, but related, consider snowboarding. Between 1998 and 2004, participation in snowboarding in the United States increased more than 300 percent, to 5.5 million enthusiasts, according to SnowSports Industries America, the industry's largest trade group. Why the increase? It's good, clean fun.



## The Chores Can Be Beneficial

Skiing, sledding, snow biking and hiking are fun ways to keep fit during the winter months. But you can also get a surprisingly good workout just by doing the following "everyday" chores:

- **Chopping wood:** A 150-pound man can burn up to 212 calories in 30 minutes swinging an ax to split wood for the family fireplace.
- **Raking and bagging leaves:** Your yard will look better, and your body will thank you for burning off 136 calories in a mere half-hour.
- **Shoveling snow:** Somebody's gotta do it, so why not use this chore to sweat off some of last night's dinner? A 210-pound man burns 300 calories shoveling snow for 30 minutes.
- **Plowing:** Believe it or not, you can even burn calories when you use a plow and tractor to move snow. The average 210-pound man burns 122 calories in a half-hour.
- **Run errands on foot:** Need to buy a gallon of milk or mail a letter? Forgo the car and walk.
- **Wash your car:** Grab a bucket and sponge and rid your car of winter's grime and salt while expending 300 calories in a mere half-hour.

Plus, boarding not only tones your entire body, it also provides a terrific cardiovascular workout, strengthening your heart and muscles.

### Sledding

Dig that toboggan out of the garage and find the nearest slope. Though you won't exercise much more than your lungs (hollering as you plunge downhill), you'll definitely get a workout walking back up to the top after each run. Maybe that's why athletic trainers such as Dyer are increasingly recommending sled-pulling as a workout method.

### Winter hiking and snow shoeing

Strap on some hiking boots with nice, thick treads and head for the woods. A brisk walk is a great way to relieve stress and

get an up-close-and-personal look at nature in a nearby park or woods. Breathe deeply and swing your arms as you go for best conditioning effect. Don't forget to take your dog.

You might also want to try snow shoeing. Not only does this sport burn a great many calories in a short amount of time, but it also is among the safest of all outdoor winter sports, and easy to learn. You will, however, need a pair of snowshoes. (Contrary to what you have seen in old movies, you cannot just strap a pair of tennis racquets to your feet and go!) Proper snowshoes are about 24 inches long and are fashioned of lightweight aluminum. They attach easily to most footwear, including hiking boots. Most snowshoe enthusiasts also consider a pair of "walking poles" essential to the sport.

Happy trails. ➤

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