



Focus on Wellness

GET OUTDOORS: Fun Ways to Stay Active this Winter

by Maria Noël Groves, Co-op Wellness Educator, Clinical Herbalist & Outdoor Enthusiast

Winter used to be my least favorite season. Cooped up indoors, lots of shoveling, and those unexpected power outages...

Then I married an avid outdoorsman and rapidly got a change of attitude. Each holiday brought a new piece of gear destined to last for decades: warm layers, snowshoes, and, eventually, cross-country (x-c) skis. Now I join him in glee during snowstorms, and we don our headlamps for nighttime backcountry ski trips in Bear Brook State Park. On weekends we barely spend a penny because we're out hiking, snowshoeing, or skiing in the park.

Any hike you do in summer, you'll burn even more calories if you do it in winter, says Garrett Facticeau, Outreach Coordinator at Eastern Mountain Sports (EMS, www.ems.com) in Concord. Traveling across snow or ice in chilly conditions is extra work for your body, so aim to cover about half the terrain you'd cross in summer.

Many low-key winter "sports" are relatively inexpensive and provide a fantastic workout. You can start out like I did: light hikes on well-packed trails at the Audubon. (*Stokes Guide to Nature in Winter* makes these walks even more interesting.) Move your way up as your interest and budget allow: hike with microspikes on icy terrain, snowshoe, or x-c ski. Once you make the initial investment in gear, they cost little to nothing. Don't forget simple activities like sledding, making snowmen with the kids, ice skating, and hockey. They're just as much fun as they are exercise!

Layer Up. First things first: dress in layers and choose them wisely, says Garrett. Save the organic cotton for cuddling on the couch. One of the biggest mistakes Garrett sees in beginners is that they wear undergarments and thermals made from cotton or

similar materials. "Cotton Kills," chants my husband each winter. As you move around and sweat, cotton soaks up the moisture and becomes wet, cold, doesn't dry easily, and can be both uncomfortable and dangerous. Instead, opt for synthetics, wool (like non-scratchy Smartwool for underlayers), and/or silk. As you get moving outdoors, you'll quickly find that a thick down jacket gets way too warm. Make sure that you can easily shed and add layers so that you're always comfortable.

Get Good Gear. Don't buy the cheapest gear you can find, warns Garrett. Often it will break down on you or not support you properly, and you'll end up tossing it in the corner of your basement, never to be seen again. Do some research, shop around, and find solid used or new equipment that will last for years, if not a lifetime. If you don't have much money, start with less expensive activities like hiking or snowshoeing. (Quality entry-level snowshoes will cost \$100-\$200. For a x-c package, \$250-300.)

Try It Before You Buy It. If you're not sure what you want to do, rent it or take a low-cost or free clinic. EMS offers free snowshoeing clinics throughout the winter; contact the Concord store at 224.8781 to learn more. Also check out Nordic skiing centers such as Dexter's (www.dextersnh.com), Eastman (www.eastmannh.org/ski), Jackson XC (www.jacksonxc.org), and Waterville Valley (www.waterville.com). Some have snowshoe trails, too.

Find Trails. Start easy with free (or nearly free) trails around town at the local Audubon Center, state park, conservation area, or snowmobile trails. Ask your local gear shop (EMS, Village Sports, S&W Sports...) for suggestions.

Enjoy! "There's really something special about getting out. There's a stillness to the air in winter. It's very still, quiet, and calming," says Garrett. "Even getting out with your kids. Get out and make a snowman. Pushing around a snowball is a lot of work, and it can be fun and rewarding."

See you out there! ■

Maria runs Wintergreen Botanicals, LLC in Allenstown. Visit www.wintergreenbotanicals.com for a virtual herb walk in winter.



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