

Falling Temperatures Don't Mean You Cannot Exercise Outdoors, Says Expert

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Don't let the temperature temper your exercise resolution. Even when the temperature drops you can still keep that New Year's exercise resolution, and you can still do it safely outdoors. Your body can adapt to the falling temperatures, according to Gary Sforzo, an expert on the physiology of exercise.

“If you are concerned about hypothermia, you don't need to be unless the temperatures are extreme,” says Sforzo, a professor of [exercise](#) and sport sciences at Ithaca College. “The body produces a lot of heat during exercise and when it produces heat, it pretty much diminishes any chance of hypothermia. The key is continuous exercise. If you go outdoors for a walk or a run, just move continuously. Don't stop for five or ten minutes to talk to your neighbor. Hikers sometimes get into trouble if they stop for lunch. As long as you are moving, the muscles produce metabolic heat and that metabolic heat will keep you pretty warm, sometimes to the point where you need to remove clothing.”

What you wear in the cold plays an important role also. Sforzo suggests a synthetic fiber next to your skin that wicks away perspiration — cotton is not a good choice for that. Also be sure to have a windproof jacket.

“The danger zone is typically in the -20 to -30 windchill zone. When the ambient temperature is in the single digits or below and you have wind, you can have some problems. When the ambient temperature gets to 20 below with even the slightest wind, then obviously hypothermia is a problem if you stand around. But in those conditions you are also

looking at the potential of frostbite.”

Frostbite is mainly a problem with the extremities. Vasoconstriction can decrease the amount of blood flowing to them so you have to keep those extremities covered with a hat, gloves and good footwear. The nose is a tough one and Sforzo recommends wearing a scarf as high as you can get it on your face.

If you are in doubt about the outdoor conditions, Sforzo suggests checking out a table that shows the danger zone on a wind chill chart before heading out to exercise (bit.ly/XtWhn). And he reminds us the chart is for exposed flesh while standing still. “We fare better when covering skin and exercising.”

Also keep in mind that your performance may go down in [cold weather](#).” Cold is not conducive to your personal best performance. Muscles perform better when they are warm. Even Olympians will not get their best performance on the coldest day.”

The body adapts to the cold temperature so, “don’t wait until it is 5 degrees outside to have your first session. When the body adapts it will have a couple of different changes. It will shiver differently and it will more readily release hormones like epinephrine and thyroxine, which allow the body to produce heat more effectively in cold weather. Get used to the cold weather and it will be more comfortable,” said Sforzo.

So excuses begone. Avoid cabin fever, dress right, get out and stick to your resolutions. As a last bit of advice, Sforzo cautions “watch out for the ice!”

Provided by Ithaca College

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