

Take a Walk in a Winter Wonderland - For Your Health!

“Your World” Submission for 2-25-2008

Most Michiganders do their best to avoid prolonged exposure to the frigid, winter air at all costs. During winter, a walk down the driveway to the mailbox constitutes as exercise for the day. However, staying active outside in the winter may have several benefits.

Walking outside in the winter lifts spirits and daily exposure to winter sunlight has been shown to ease seasonal depression. Many people spiritually thrive from winter walking, gaining satisfaction from the purity and beauty that winter offers. Walking in winter makes many folks feel exhilarated and energized and generally more “alive.” One advantage that winter walking has over summer walking, is that it is mosquito-free. Finally, you get to enjoy the cup of hot cocoa afterward!

The key to receiving all the benefits of winter activities is dressing appropriately. Follow these tips to stay safe and get the most out of your winter experience:

- **Layers, Layers, Layers** - Try a moisture-wicking synthetic next to the skin, with an insulating layer of fleece in the middle and a wind/water-resistant top shell. Make sure to not go overboard. If done properly, you will feel chilly at first, which will prevent you from overheating later.
- **Wear a Hat** – Remember that you lose most of your heat through your head!
- **Hand Care** -- They can be slow to warm up during a walk or run. To keep them toasty, try mittens instead of gloves (the fingers warm each other) or add glove liners or hand-warming inserts.
- **Feet Care** -- Keep them dry and warm with synthetic or wool blend socks. If icy patches are a threat, try walking with Nordic poles and high-traction shoes.
- **Plan Ahead** -- Cold can be dangerous if you stop moving or get too wet, so it's always a good idea to take a cell phone or buddy.

Yes, it requires a little more than stepping out for a summer stroll. But it's worth it. Next time you're feeling antsy and restless indoors, bundle up properly and take a walk outside. Don't let the winter weather stop you!

Check out Washtenaw County's Park and Recreation webpage (http://www.ewashtenaw.org/living/recreation/lv_rc_index.html) to find a park near you.

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