

Why Should I Add Pilates to My Workout?

By Merce Howard, Certified Pilates Instructor

Taking it outside

Here's how to get the most out of your cold-weather workout:

- **Check with your doctor.** Experts say that almost everyone can exercise safely in the cold, including people with asthma and heart problems. If you have health concerns, get your doctor's OK.
- **Layer it on.** One of the biggest mistakes cold-weather exercisers make is dressing too warmly. Exercise generates a considerable amount of heat — enough to make you feel like it's 30 degrees warmer than it really is. At the same time, once you start to tire and the sweat dries, you can get chilled. The solution? Dress in layers that you can remove as soon as you start to sweat and then put back on as needed. Start with a thin layer of synthetic material such as polypropylene, which draws sweat away from your body. Avoid cotton, which stays wet next to your skin. Next, try fleece for insulation. Top this with a waterproof, breathable outer layer. A heavy down jacket or vest will cause most people to overheat. If you're naturally lean though, you'll need more insulation than someone who is heavier. If it's very cold (about 0 F or -17.8 C) or you have asthma, wear a face mask or a scarf over your mouth.
- **Protect your extremities.** When it's cold, blood is shunted to your body's core, leaving your hands and feet vulnerable to frostbite. Try wearing a thin pair of gloves under a pair of heavier gloves or mittens lined with wool or fleece. You might want to buy exercise shoes a half-size larger than usual to allow for thick thermal socks or an extra pair of regular socks. And don't forget a hat or headband — 30 to 40 percent of your body heat is lost through your head.
- **Choose appropriate gear.** If it's dark, wear reflective clothing. To stay steady on your feet, choose footwear with enough traction to prevent falls. Wear a helmet for skiing, snowboarding and snowmobiling.
- **Remember sunscreen.** It's as easy to get sunburned in winter as in summer — even more so if you're exercising in the snow or at high altitudes. Wear a sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB rays and has an SPF of at least 15. Use a lip balm that contains sunscreen, and protect your eyes from snow and ice glare with dark glasses or goggles.
- **Head into the wind.** You'll be less likely to get chilled on the way back if you end your workout — when you may be sweaty — with the wind at your back.
- **Drink plenty of fluids.** Drink water or sports drinks before, during and after your workout — even if you're not thirsty. You can become just as dehydrated in the cold as in the heat from sweating, breathing and increased urine production.
- **Pay attention to wind chill.** The wind can penetrate your clothes and remove the insulating layer of warm air that surrounds your body. Fast motion — such as skiing, running, cycling or skating — also creates wind chill because it increases air movement past your body. When the temperature is 10 F (-12.2 C) and the air is calm, skiing at 20 miles an hour creates a wind chill of minus 9 (-22.8 C). If the temperature dips well below zero (-17.8 C), choose an indoor activity instead.
- **Know the signs of frostbite and hypothermia.** Frostbite is most common on your face, fingers and toes. Early warning signs include paleness, numbness and loss of feeling or a stinging sensation. If you suspect frostbite, get out of the cold immediately and slowly warm the affected area without rubbing. If numbness continues, seek emergency care. If you suspect hypothermia — characterized by intense shivering, slurred speech, loss of coordination and fatigue — get emergency help right away. To help prevent problems, warm your hands and feet every 20 to 30 minutes, and know when to head for home.

Stay motivated. When it's cold outdoors, there's no need to hit the couch. With a little knowledge and fortitude, you can meet the challenges — and reap the rewards — of winter exercise. For many people, the solitude and quiet alone are reason enough to brave the elements.

