



Cold Weather Guidelines

Many of you enjoy spending time or exercising outdoors throughout the winter. If you plan and take precautions, you may safely enjoy your favorite activities through much of the winter season! Understand that cold weather adds additional stress onto the cardiovascular system. The body tries to prevent heat loss by constricting the blood vessels in the skin and shunting the blood back to vital organs. This narrowing of the arteries, in particular the coronary arteries increase blood pressure. For those with narrowed arteries due to plaque buildup, this can mean angina. Angina can also be caused by breathing in cold air through your mouth.

Wind and wind chill add to the intensity of outdoor exercise. They increase the resistance on your body when moving and can cause you to get tired more quickly.

Safety Tips:

Warm-up first and warm-up longer: Warm-up for 10 minutes to help get your body accustomed to the colder temperatures and to prepare (allowing arteries to dilate) for your exercise bout.

Pay attention to your body and give yourself frequent breaks so you do not overstress your heart

Wear 2-4 layers of light weaved clothing: This builds layers of insulation that will pull moisture away from your body. Use wools, fleece, and other synthetic materials. Avoid cottons.

Cover your head, hands, and mouth! Wear a hat/face mask and gloves to prevent heat loss through your extremities. Wear a scarf/face mask to limit breathing in cold air.

Avoid eating a heavy meal prior to outdoor activity. The heart is focused on pumping blood to the stomach for digestion; both activities combined can place undue stress on the heart.

Avoid alcoholic beverages before heading outside. Alcohol can cause a person to underestimate the colder temperatures.

Pay attention to the temperature and the wind chill! Avoid outdoor exercise at temperatures below 40 degrees or below 40 degrees when wind chill is factored in. Be aware that wind chills make 40- or 50-degree weather feel much colder, and wind increases intensity of outdoor movement!

Caution: Shoveling Snow/Snow Blowers

If you have known cardiovascular disease or uncontrolled high blood pressure you should avoid shoveling snow. Recent cardiac surgery patients should not attempt! (sternal precautions)

Shoveling snow can cause heart rate increases greater than that which you normally exercise. Most people do not warm-up for 10 minutes prior to shoveling snow. Snow is heavy- This causes increased heart rate and blood pressure response. Be cautious with snow blowers as well, they can be heavy and tough to push therefore just as risky as snow shoveling!

**It is usually colder than 40 degrees when snow and ice are on the ground,
outdoor activity is not advised**