

## **WINTER WALKING AND HIKING**

There's no need to stop walking and hiking when winter comes. Most trail clubs continue their activities year round and some of the most pleasant outings are through the snow, when the scenery sparkles or the sun glimmers in the pearly mist. However a little thought is required to keep safe and comfortable in the colder weather.

Let's start with comfort. Most of your hiking clothes will be suitable for winter hiking. Your regular boots and "sock and a half" (polypropylene liner and wool outer sock) remain the same. Wool or nylon hiking pants are helped along by the addition of gaiters that keep the snow out of your boots. Tops come in three layers, polypropylene underwear (keeps you dry), fleece pullover (keeps you warm) and a wind/waterproof jacket. A fleece hat and mitts are light and can be taken on and off.

Cotton has its place, but not in winter activities. Cotton's problem is that it retains moisture - either yours or the elements. This moisture quickly cools, leaving you with a cold or frozen layer, which is a primary cause of hypothermia. To be dry is to be both comfortable and safe.

Safety should always be a consideration, summer or winter, but mistakes made in winter may be less forgiving.

Shorter days. Know your route. Know when sunset is scheduled and plan to be off the trail well before. Carry a map and a flashlight.

Ice can be present. Consider a trekking pole (looks like a ski pole) with a carbide tip that chunks into the ice. You will probably like your pole so much that you will use it year round - a great knee-saver on the down hills. You can also wear "icers", which are essentially studded soles that strap on over your boots.

Dehydration. Our normal sense of thirst lets us down in winter but we must keep drinking water. The consequences of dehydration, such as confusion, fatigue, bladder infections and kidney stones, are all best avoided.

Sun protection. Still required. The cool weather will try to fool you, but use that sun screen. At least SPF 15, and most authorities recommend even higher.

Hike with a group or at least a friend. Your mother told you there is safety in numbers and hiking is a good application of the rule. Problems do arise and the presence of other people helps.

Pack your pack with a few additional items to add more comfort and safety to the hike. A first aid kit, an extra layer such as a small down jacket for when you stop, a piece of closed cell foam to sit on, more water than you think you'll use, a good

lunch and some high energy snacks, a spare set of socks and mitts, rain pants and some lip protection.

Walking in winter is something of a fine line: you want to walk fast enough to keep warm, but not so fast that you perspire excessively. Hike leaders should be especially aware of this, watching the pace of the hike and providing stops for "clothing adjustments" and rests.

Where to walk? In southern parts of the province there are areas of little or no snow such as the Niagara and Iroquoia sections of the Bruce Trail and the area south of Brantford on the Grand Valley Trail. The Elgin Trail south of London is worth considering. Toronto's Leslie Street Spit, Toronto Islands and the Toronto ravines usually have little snow. In the central and northern parts of the province many a fine winter walk can be had on quiet country roads. Finally keep in mind that cross-country skiers do not appreciate you walking on their trails.

Canada's winters are long but they shouldn't keep you from enjoying nature and getting exercise. Wellness experts advise that outdoor exercise is one of the best ways of avoiding SAD (seasonal affective disorder), a distinctive type of winter depression. The bottom line is to continue hiking and reap the benefits year round.