

Wellness Articles

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Get Moving! Winter Health and Fitness Week

Colder temperatures and shorter days may make Albertans want to stay in and hibernate indoors. But staying active in the winter can provide many benefits, including improving your physical and mental health and overall well-being.

Winter Health and Fitness Week runs from Feb. 14 to 20, which serves as a good reminder for all Albertans to bundle up, beat the winter blues, and discover a variety of ways to keep your body moving. Maintaining regular physical activity reduces your risk of chronic illnesses such as heart disease, type-2 diabetes, stroke and certain types of cancer. And while staying active in the winter may require some creativity and planning, your body and mind will thank you ... and it may even make winter more fun!

Here are some ideas, tips, and ways to get you started:

Enjoy the outdoors!

- Plan fun activities for yourself, friends or family! Go snowshoeing, skating, make a snow angel or try a new winter sport. Finding new ways to enjoy the outdoors can make winter more fun.
- Remember to use the right protective gear and equipment and [check our safety and winter tips guideline](#).
- Schedule time for new activities before or after school or work, during a lunch break or on the weekends. Register for [Winter Walk Day](#) to get outdoors and walking with others across Alberta.
- [‘Walk like a penguin’](#) to prevent falls when it’s icy. Try walking poles or use crampons for better grip on snow and ice.

Prepare for the temperature before heading out

- Visit [Environment Canada, 511.Alberta.ca](#) or download the [WeatherCAN](#) or [AEA Alert](#) app for current weather and driving conditions or alerts.
- Try walking, running, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and other activities where you move a lot to help keep you warm when the temperature dips.
- Take frequent warming breaks and plan activities around the warmest time of day and close to a shelter (home, coffee shops or chalets) when possible in case weather conditions change.

- Find an indoor location to exercise in if it's too cold or snowy to be outdoors, like a mall or recreational centre. Join an indoor walking group or invite friends to stay motivated.
- Learn about [hypothermia](#) and [frostbite](#) and how to recognize the signs and symptoms.

Dress for the weather

- Cover as much exposed skin as possible. Wear warm, waterproof and windproof layers, scarves, neck warmers, protective face liners and waterproof footwear. Hand and feet warmers are good sources of instant warmth.
- Be active outdoors during daylight hours so others can see you, but if you're outside in early morning or evening try to wear bright colours, reflective materials and consider bringing a flashlight or headlamp with you.
- Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen that is SPF 30 or higher to exposed skin before heading outside. UVR rays remain constant throughout the year, even when cold, cloudy or foggy.
- Use UV eye protection for retinal protection during bright days, especially with additional reflection from snow.

Create long lasting, healthy habits

- Make SMART goals that are:
 - Specific
 - Measurable
 - Attainable
 - Realistic
 - Timebound
- Start with smaller, more achievable goals first. For example, if you want to start an outdoor activity, try a 15-minute outdoor walk on a break. Increase how long you walk by five minutes as the length becomes easier. If the temp is too cold, try walking indoors.
- Record and track your progress over time in a [journal or activity record](#).
- Enjoy winter sports, activities and games with friends and family who can support you to achieve your goals.

For more family-friendly ideas to get moving this winter, go to:

- [Whatever the weather!](#) (version for families with kids in Kindergarten to Grade 6).
- [Cold weather life hacks](#) (version for families with teens in Grade 7 to Grade 12).

Move more!

[Canada's 24 Hour Movement Guidelines](#) recommend adults ages 18 to 64 are active at least 150 minutes per week with aerobic activities (walking, jogging, biking), sleep seven to 9 hours per night, limit screen time and break up long periods of sitting as often as possible.

Learn more about movement guidelines for different ages by visiting [24-Hour Movement Guidelines – Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines](#) (csepguidelines.ca).