

## **When the Weather Gets Cold, Don't Forget to Warm Up and Cool Down!**

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Colder weather means some changes to how we exercise. Of course it's harder to motivate yourself to get outside for a run or bike ride when the temperature drops, and the shorter days compress our schedules, but there are changes in your body that affect your ability to exercise too. For many people with arthritis or other joint problems, cold weather brings more complaints of pain. To stay warm, our bodies narrow blood vessels to reduce blood flow to the skin, and more superficial muscles. That means that there is an increased risk of muscle strains in the cold. There is also an increased strain on the heart because of the narrowed blood vessels. This isn't to say that you shouldn't be active outdoors in the cold, it just means you may have to make a few changes to your routine. Here are a few to consider:

### **Warm up right**

A good warm up is always important, but because of the tendency for joints to be stiffer, and blood flow to muscles to be reduced in the cold, it's even more important that you do it right this time of year. To start, do something to get your heart rate up a bit, maybe a brisk walk or light jog. Follow that up with a dynamic warm up rather than static stretches. This could include walking or jogging while pulling your knees up high to your chest. Maybe some high kicks in front of you with straight knees to get your hamstrings loosened. A walking lunge with an upper body twist can get your whole body moving. Cater your warm up to what you have planned in your workout. If you're not sure how, ask your physical therapist!

### **Dress right**

Dressing in layers allows you to adjust your insulation to your activity level. After you warm up, you might want to take off a layer to avoid getting too hot during your main activity. You'll have it later to put back on when your activity level drops and you start getting too cold. Don't forget about the sun either - just because it's cold doesn't mean the UV rays are gone. Sunscreen and sunglasses aren't just for the summer. A lip balm with SPF can protect you not only from the sun but from the wind too. Stay hydrated by drinking water before, during, and after your workout. The temperature may be down, but you'll still sweat and you'll still lose water vapor in your breath. The drier air in winter lets your sweat evaporate more quickly, so it's easy to underestimate how much fluid you've lost.

### **Cool down**

When you're done, don't rush to get inside and crawl under a blanket. Cool down properly. Keep moving with a walk or another form of active recovery to let your heart rate come down. After exercise is the right time for static stretching. You can also head inside for some foam rolling or self massage. The days being shorter and the temperatures being lower don't mean you're stuck inside for all of your exercise. If you follow these tips, you can safely keep moving outside. If you'd like a customized warm up or cool down, or have questions about your exercise routine, your physical therapist is a great person to ask!