

Staying Active During the Winter Months: The Whys and Hows

Did you know that during the frosty, winter season some bears hibernate for six months or more? Partly because of an inadequate food supply during this time, these amazing animals hunker down and sleep to survive this blustery time of year. Due to bears not eating during their long snooze, they can drop a stunning amount of body weight while hibernating.



While hibernating is a fascinating survival mechanism for these mammals, other species, namely humans, are not meant to hibernate from Thanksgiving dinner to April fool's day. It's certainly understandable that many of us are less physically active during this time, but unlike the bear, humans aren't likely to lose weight and stay healthy when sedentary through winter. That's why, as one of your PEBTF health coaches, I've chosen to write this article for you. Keep reading and I'll outline five whys and five hows of staying physically active during this impending, frigid time.

Why stay active during winter?

1. **Have more energy** – Some people I talk to mistakenly believe that when they're feeling a bit low on energy that they'll feel better after a nice meal and a cat nap. While I'm sure this is true some of the time, more of the time I find we get the sustained energy level we desire from being physically active. Yes it takes energy to be active, but many people I speak with say even a short period of their favorite form of physical activity provides a better boost in energy than eating or sleeping the day away.
2. **Raise your mood** – We may not all be runners, but I believe most of us have heard of the runner's high. Even if you're not into running, we all can experience the feel good hormones that often come from being physically active. If you're looking for an immediate pay off of being physically active, this might be a solid motivator for you!
3. **You won't have to lose that winter weight gain yet again this spring** – If you're anything like the average person, you pick up a few pounds during the holiday season. Wouldn't it be nice to not gain weight this year, be able to set a New Year's resolution other than losing weight again, and move on to achieving something else in 2019? Staying active this winter could do this for you.
4. **Protect your health** – For many of you, the Get Healthy wellness screening is another opportunity to check on your health status and get a clean bill of health. Instead of living a healthy lifestyle during just the warmer months, think about striving to protect your health and keep your blood pressure, etc. in the normal ranges all year round.

5. **Feel proud** – We’ve all accomplished a lot in our lives. When we set goals and achieve them, a sense of pride often comes over us, which feels great. This great feeling can come after a season full of activity, but it can also come after *each* workout!

How to stay active during winter?

1. **Bundle up and get out** – This might be the perfect excuse to visit your local sporting goods store to get some fancy, new cold weather gear. With those new, warm gloves on, you won’t have to hesitate when considering going for a lap of the neighborhood on foot.
2. **Try body weight exercises** – If you’re realistically not going to brave the elements, consider staying indoors and doing some body weight exercises. Doing squats, lunges, pushups, crunches, etc. are great, no-cost, no-equipment ways to tone muscles and stay healthy this winter.
3. **Go on-demand** – Find exercise videos to guide you through your next winter workout on your cable provider’s on-demand service. Borrowing exercise DVDs using your library card is another great option.
4. **Partner up** – Recruit a family member, friend, or coworker to be your workout buddy. They’ll encourage you to stay active on days when your motivation is low. You can do the same for them when their motivation level dips. Together you’ll both stay more active than if you were to go the road alone.
5. **Write down a SMART goal** – When you know what you want to do for physical activity, write it down in the form of a SMART goal, which is Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound. Once you’ve written out your SMART goal, post it somewhere you’ll see it often as a reminder of what you’re working on.



There’s a plethora of reasons to stay active this winter season. Consider what *your* motivators will be when the snow and ice make their return. No matter why you choose to be physically active this holiday season, know there’s ample opportunity to stay fit. Choose a form or two of physical activity that you enjoy and get to it! Don’t be a bear!

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<https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/nature/denning.htm>