

W I N T E R C A M P I N G S A F E T Y T I P S

Outdoor enthusiasts will be the first to tell you that camping isn't exclusively a summer activity. However, if you do want to try camping in winter, you'll need to take additional precautions. Because cold-weather outdoor recreation poses increased risks, even experienced campers can benefit from winter camping tips. Here's how to stay safe, energized, and warm on your winter camping trip.

Staying Warm

In the winter, staying warm is easily the most important of all camping safety tips. A suitable weather shelter, mindfully chosen clothing, and efficient sleeping and heating gear are essential for this.

Camp Stove Safety, Heater Safety, and Camp Fire Safety

Campfires may be harder to light in wet winter weather, so bring a lightweight, energy-efficient propane camp stove for cooking. Read all instructions carefully. Never use it in or near a tent or cabin, leave it unattended, or put it in a container to block the wind. Keep propane canisters away from heat and be sure the stove is completely cool before opening it, changing canisters, or storing it.

If you do plan to have a campfire, check with the fire department in your camping area first and follow all guidelines. Even in winter, campfire accidents can happen, so take the same precautions as you would in summer.

Winter Tent Camping: Important Equipment

If you plan on camping in a tent, it's best to check your tent before leaving to ensure it's functional, has no holes or damage, and that all parts of it are accounted for. Use a strong four-season tent with a rainfly and a roof designed to shed snow to avoid collapse. Be sure it's large enough for both campers and equipment and bring extra poles and a ground sheet, such as a space blanket or tarp.

It's also important to bring a closed-cell sleeping pad to keep your sleeping bag off the (potentially frozen) ground, since a cold ground will drain away body heat. Check the temperature rating on your sleeping bag. Most cutesy "character" sleeping bags that are marketed towards kids are not rated for safe cold weather camping.

- Avoid air mattresses or putting your tent on a raised platform during cold weather camping because you cannot warm the air in the mattress or control the draft under the raised platform.
- Do put a trap under your tent as a barrier between the wet / cold ground and the floor of your tent. Added layers of protection could be a layer of foam mats to cover

the bottom of the tent (or foam sleeping mats). Then a layer of moving blankets on top of the mats. Then your sleeping bags.

- Do cover the top (overlapping the sides) of your tent with another top to aid in keeping moisture out and the heat in.



Layered Clothing

Keep these tips in mind when you're packing clothing:

- **Avoid cotton.** Cotton is light and breathable, which is great for staying cool in the summer, but terrible for retaining heat in winter. It also doesn't wick away moisture, so if it gets wet, you'll be even colder. Instead, opt for wool and synthetic fabrics like fleece, polypropylene, and other hydrophobic and wicking materials.
- **Layer up.** Pack close-fitting base layers as well as middle insulating layers and warm top layers that can easily be removed, put back on, or added to as needed. Choose a windproof, waterproof, and ideally tear-resistant coat with a sturdy synthetic outer shell fabric, such as Gore-Tex. Pack plenty of socks; you'll need to layer them too. About 70% of your body heat escapes through your head, so pack a warm hat as well.
- **Overpack; don't under pack.** In the winter, you'll not only need more layers, but more changes of clothes because of the increased likelihood of getting wet. Wet clothes in the cold can quickly lead to hypothermia, so pack plenty of changes of clothing.
- **Choose insulated boots.** Choose waterproof rubber or leather boots with a wool or felt lining in a slightly larger size than your regular shoes are. This will allow room for layered socks and help to create a warm space of dead air between your feet and your boots.

Food and Meals

Hypothermia can also be caused by eating insufficiently calorie-dense foods or by not eating enough or frequently enough. Some considerations for packing food include:

Avoiding produce. Because fresh produce will weigh down your already heavy bags, when you're planning meals, it's best to pack primarily light or non-perishable items like grains, pasta, oatmeal, or baked goods. You can make exceptions for high-protein and high-fat items like cheese, butter, and meats.

Snacks. Bring high-energy portable foods like nuts, raisins, chocolate, candy, and cookies or brownies. Be sure to bring a water bottle with a wide mouth (to avoid a frozen opening) and a shoulder-strap container (so your body heat can keep the rest of the bottle from freezing).

Keeping warm while you're cooking. It's ideal to bring soup mix or a hot beverage that can be made in a personal mug so that campers can stay warm while they wait for the main course.

Bringing food with you to bed. Plan to thaw frozen food for the next day by placing it in or near your sleeping bag. If you get hungry in the middle of the night, it's best to eat proteins, which help you to stay warm over a longer period.

There are many other winter camping guidelines to consider; you can find extensive safety tips [here](#).

Camping Safety for Kids

It's useful to learn camping safety from a young age. Scouting programs and outdoor adventures give young people the opportunity to try new things, provide service to others, build self-confidence, and develop leadership skills. These experiences not only help Scouts while they are young but help them grow into exceptional men and women that respect their family, community, religion, country and themselves.

OUTDOOR CLOTHING LAYERING SYSTEM



HOW TO SLEEP WARM

1. GO TO BED WARM

Do a few jumping jacks, push ups – just enough to warm yourself up but before you start sweating. If you get in a sleeping bag when you are cold you'll likely stay cold.

2. FUEL UP

If it's going to be a very cold night consider a pre-bedtime snack that will keep the furnace burning. Slow burning fatty snacks are better than refined sugars or caffeine.



3. WATER

You need to be well hydrated to stay warm.



How much water to drink within the hour or two before you go to sleep is determined by how fast you process it. If you need to get up early drinking a lot of water before bedding down will serve as a natural alarm clock – it can be tricky to get the timing right. If nature calls in the middle of the night get up and go! Holding it in makes you colder.

4. CLOTHING

Change as much of your clothing as possible. The clothes you wore all day will be a bit damp and cold. If you wear them to bed you'll have to warm your cold damp clothes up before you get warm.



5. HOT WATER BOTTLES

Consider filling your water bottles with hot water, wrapping them with some spare clothing and warming up your sleeping bag before you get in it.

6. WEAR A HAT

We lose heat from our heads. It's not an old wife's tale; wear a hat to keep your feet warm.



7. KEEP YOUR NOSE AND MOUTH OUTSIDE

Don't put your nose and mouth into your sleeping bag. Moisture from breathing will make the bag and your clothing damp. A well-designed mummy style sleeping bag will allow you to close the bag so only your nose and mouth are exposed.

8. KEEP OFF THE GROUND

Sleeping warm means insulating your self from the ground. A good insulating pad is important.

9. SLEEPING BAG SOCKS

If you get cold feet try keeping a dedicated pair of thick, loose fleece or wool socks worn only in the sleeping bag.



10. SHAKE UP YOUR BAG

Whatever type of insulation is in your sleeping bag it will be compressed from packing. Do a good job of shaking and re-distributing the insulation before you get in the bag.





COLD-WEATHER OUTING



- Long-sleeved shirt
- Long pants (fleece or wool)
- Sweater (fleece or wool)
- Long underwear (polypropylene)
- Hiking boots or sturdy shoes
- Socks (wool or synthetic)
- Warm parka or jacket with hood
- Stocking hat (fleece or wool)
- Mittens or gloves (fleece or wool) with water-resistant shells
- Wool scarf
- Rain gear
- Extra underwear (for longer trips)

COLD-WEATHER EXPERT ESSENTIALS:

- Bandana
- Sorel boots
- Wind parka with hood
- Side-attaching suspenders

2 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU NEEDED:

- Rubberized gloves
- Headlamp

THE SCOUT OUTDOOR ESSENTIALS

They're called Essentials for a reason. Every packing list starts with these items.

- Pocket knife
- First-aid kit
- Extra clothing
- Rain gear
- Water bottle
- Flashlight
- Trail food
- Matches and fire starter
- Sun protection
- Map and compass



KEEPING CLEAN

- Toothbrush
- Toothpaste
- Dental floss
- Soap
- Comb
- Waterless hand cleaner
- Small towel
- Washcloth
- Toilet paper
- Trowel for digging cathole latrines

COOKING/EATING

- Large plastic cereal bowl or kitchen storage bowl
- Spoon
- Cup or Insulated mug
- Water treatment system
- Backpacking stove with fuel
- Large pot and lid (2.5- or 3-quart size)
- Small pot and lid (1.5- or 2-quart size)
- Lightweight frying pan (10 to 12 inches in diameter)
- For melting snow, add one large pot and lid (6 to 10 quarts)
- Hot-pot tongs

EXTRAS

- Watch
- Camera
- Notebook
- Pen or pencil
- Sunglasses
- Small musical instrument
- Swimsuit
- Gloves
- Whistle
- Nylon cord
- Insect repellent
- Repair kit
- Hiking stick or trekking poles
- Binoculars
- Fishing gear
- Animal identification books, plant keys, geological studies, star charts etc.

SPOT

FROSTBITE

A victim is often unaware of frostbite because frozen tissue is numb.



Signs & Symptoms

- Redness or pain in any skin area may be the first sign of frostbite.

Other signs include:

- a white or grayish-yellow skin area
- skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
- numbness

HYPOTHERMIA

Hypothermia often occurs at very cold temperatures, but can occur at cool temperatures (above 40°F), if a person is wet (from rain, sweat or cold water) and becomes chilled.



Signs & Symptoms

Adults:

- shivering
- exhaustion
- confusion
- fumbling hands
- memory loss
- slurred speech
- drowsiness

Infants:

- bright red, cold skin
- very low energy



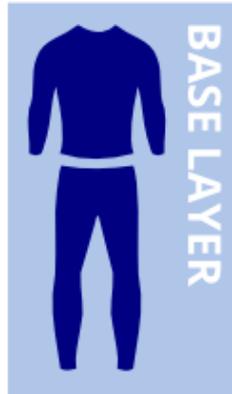
If a person's temperature is below 95° get medical attention immediately.

OUTDOOR CLOTHING BASICS

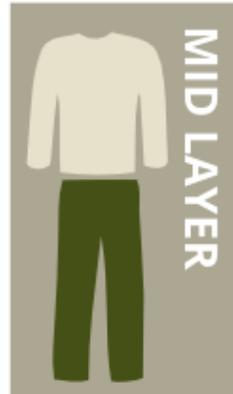
The secret to dressing for the outdoors is layering. The base layer is worn against the skin, a mid layer goes over the base, an insulating layer is next, and a shell layer is worn over everything. Layers are adjusted according to the season and conditions.



Synthetic tee shirt and undershorts for all seasons.



Synthetic or wool long underwear for cold conditions.



All-purpose layer that can be worn in any conditions.



Synthetic fleece pullover, jacket or wool sweater. synthetic fleece pants for cool to cold weather.



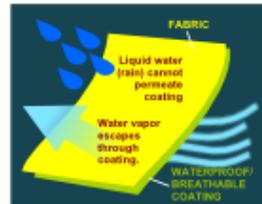
Rain jacket with hood and rain pants for all seasons.

Waterproof or Waterproof Breathable?

Basic waterproof rain gear works very well. The relatively small amount of moisture trapped inside a waterproof rain suit will be wicked away from the skin by the under layers, and you'll stay comfortable. Waterproof fabrics are less expensive.



Waterproof fabrics have an impermeable coating that does not allow water vapor to escape from the inside out, but still keeps the rain out.



Waterproof breathable fabrics are constructed with a permeable membrane that permits water vapor to escape from the inside out without allowing liquid water to penetrate from the outside in.

What about Ponchos? Ponchos are awkward when doing just about anything other than sitting still. A waterproof jacket and pants are much more serviceable.

THE "SAFETY SUIT"



I know from experience a rain jacket, rain pants, and synthetic or wool long underwear tops and bottoms can keep you reasonably warm and safe in the worst kind of weather no matter what the season. **Carry these two essential layers on any trip.**



Cotton Kills

It may sound overly dramatic, but it isn't. Cotton is fine for dry, warm conditions but ideally dry and warm conditions are rare. It is much harder to stay dry and warm outdoors than most people think.

Cotton holds moisture and moisture saps body heat. When the body loses heat faster than it can produce heat hypothermia sets in. At first, this is merely uncomfortable; but it can become serious medical emergency. Hypothermia can happen at temperatures well above freezing.

Synthetic or wool fabrics insulate even when wet and are strongly recommended for cold weather. In warmer weather, a synthetic base layer draws perspiration away from the skin and keeps you cool and comfortable.