



# “Cool” Exercise Tips

by Kathleen Pratt, ND

Year ‘round, indoors or out, it’s important to follow certain healthy habits before, during and after exercise to prevent injury and get the most out of your workout. But, if you prefer outdoor exercise to putting in minutes on the treadmill, you’ll need to take additional precautions to protect against challenges posed by winter’s cool weather conditions.

If you’re an indoor athlete, you’ll find many of these tips useful, too, even if your only outdoor exercise is a quick dash from the car to the gym.

And, while most people who follow these tips will be completely fine exercising outdoors in winter, if you have cold- or exercise-induced asthma, Raynaud’s syndrome or some heart conditions, please check with your doctor first.

## BEFORE EXERCISE

Contrary to popular belief, stretching before exercise does not help prevent injuries; so skip that step, until after your workout. But, warming up is still important and we recommend you do it indoors.

A good warm up increases blood flow to muscles, promotes flexibility and, as a side benefit, makes it easier to head out the door. Here are some exercises we recommend...

### Warm Up

- Jogging in place
- Stationary lunges
- Core exercises like planks, crunches, bicycles, etc.
- Yoga [sun salutations](#)
- Sport specific [exercises for skiing](#), etc.

### Clothing and Safety Gear

Once you’re well warmed up, dress appropriately for heading outdoors. The key is to dress in layers and use appropriate fabrics.

Start with a thin wicking layer like a polypropylene shirt. Don’t use cotton, as it holds in moisture. Add a warming layer and top with an outer waterproof layer. As soon as you start to sweat, remove a layer. If you dress too warmly or don’t have layers to remove, you may sweat too much too quickly, and then get chilled from the sweat.

Make sure hands, feet and ears are appropriately protected. And, if running or biking in the dark, which is much of the day during a Pacific Northwest winter, make sure you have lights, reflective gear or high-visibility clothing.

Skiers and snowboarders...a helmet and other safety gear are absolute musts. Wearing reflective or high-visibility clothing can also help avoid collisions.

## DURING EXERCISE

### Hydration

Hydration is important whenever you exercise. Whether hot or cold, you can become just as dehydrated from sweating, breathing and increased urine production, although it may be harder to notice during cold weather. So drink water or sports drinks before, during and after your workout, even if you’re not feeling thirsty.

### Danger signs

Be aware of problems that can occur with prolonged exposure to the cold, such as frostbite and hypothermia. Frostbite is most likely to occur on the face, fingers and toes. A first warning sign is tingling, numbness and/or pain in the affected area. Early signs of hypothermia are intense shivering, slurring speech and disorientation. People who are becoming hypothermic may not realize it, so watch for signs in your exercise partners.

## BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER

### Diet

If you are a morning exerciser, make sure you’ve eaten before you get going. The food and sugars from the night before will mostly be used up and your blood sugar will be low. Studies show that eating a carbohydrate snack before working out improves performance.

For workouts longer than an hour or so, you might need a snack or a sports drink that contains electrolytes and sugar during your workout. This helps maintain blood sugar levels, which prevents “hitting the wall” and those distracting hunger pangs.

To maximize your recovery after exercise, eat something within two hours that contains both protein and carbohydrates. Refueling in this way helps your muscles recover and

repair, and rebuilds glycogen (stored sugars).

Good post-workout foods include nuts and dried fruits, yogurt and fruit, a nut-butter sandwich and even chocolate milk. This is one time you don't need to worry about eating simpler sugars, as they will be used up efficiently without doing any harm.

### Supplements

Exercise increases oxidative stress and protein utilization, but be cautious about supplementing with heavy doses of antioxidants and proteins.

Studies have been done on the use of antioxidant supplements for exercise, but the results have been inconclusive and controversial. We recommend a good multivitamin that contains 100% of daily values as the only antioxidant supplementation most people need.

With regard to protein, you can find many supplements and protein powders marketed specifically to athletes these days. Yet consuming excessive protein over a long period of time may put a burden on your kidneys. So be careful!

As mentioned above, your muscles will recover better if you eat a protein- and carbohydrate-rich snack or meal within two hours of exercise. But, be aware that your absolute

protein requirement does not rise much with average exercise; only if you're training for something as rigorous as the Olympics or an Ironman. The typical daily protein requirement is .8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight (44 grams of protein for a 120 lb person or 65 grams of protein for a 180 lb person). That requirement may go up a little for very intense exercisers to 1.2 grams per kilogram.

Minerals, which are also depleted during exercise, are another story. Calcium and magnesium, as well as potassium, are excellent for reducing muscle soreness and preventing muscle cramps. Some supplements, such as Muscle Aid by Biogenesis, provide a nice balance of minerals, amino acids (protein) and a few key vitamins to help with recovery.

Herbs and plant medicines can also be used to help with things like inflammation and muscle soreness. Turmeric root, for example, is an excellent antioxidant and Boswellia has been shown to help with joint pain.

This winter, we encourage you to remain active and enjoy the beauty of the Northwest, even if you're tempted to curl up by the fire instead. Your body will thank you, if you follow these simple tips. And, of course, remember to talk with your doctor before starting any new exercise, diet or supplement program. ❖