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## Winter Months and Most Health Conditions are No Excuse for Not Exercising

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)—It is difficult to exercise during the winter months in Ohio. While ice, snow and cold temperatures can keep people from the outdoors, it is not an excuse for avoiding physical fitness and staying healthy.

“The key to staying motivated anytime, but especially during the winter, is to vary your exercise. Make it fun, involve others, set easy-to-reach goals and reward yourself for hitting those goals,” said Bryan Ghiloni, M.D., a family physician and sports medicine specialist in north Columbus, Ohio.

There are many options for outside exercise including walks, exercise programs at local parks, cross country skiing, or ice skating. Even snow shoveling can count as exercise.

“Ohio has some beautiful parks that sponsor walking and fitness programs. For example, Columbus has its ‘Walk with a Doc’ program (<http://www.walkwithadoc.org>) that continues through the winter at local parks,” explained Ghiloni.

A family physician can help develop an exercise program that is right for each individual. Depending on the individual’s goals, it is recommended to exercise three to six times per week. Several days may involve aerobic exercise and the others may be resistance (machines or weights). Aerobic exercise might include joining a local gym program (dance, spinning, etc.). Other forms of aerobic exercise include fast walking at a local shopping mall, or using a treadmill or stationary bike at home.

Before exercising outside, check the weather and be sure to dress appropriately and with multiple thin layers.

“The trapped air between layers makes great insulation, the thin layers allow for easier movement, and if you get too hot, it is easy to peel off one or two layers,” said Ghiloni.

People with certain health conditions need to take extra precautions before exercising in the cold weather. They should discuss their plans with their family physician. Exposure to cold air adds additional stress to the heart. Therefore, anyone with a heart condition needs to take extra precautions and may not be able to safely exercise in the cold. Cold air can worsen asthma type symptoms causing or worsening wheezing. Anyone with asthma, emphysema or other lung diseases should discuss ways to avoid exacerbations with their physician.

Setting attainable goals is also an important part of exercising during cold months.

“Easy goals provide a feeling of accomplishment and keep you motivated. Goals could be a one or two pound weight loss in a week, increased running distance or time, or exercising every day you set out to exercise. And, every time you accomplish a goal, reward yourself. Rewards can include a special dinner out, a small treat, a day off from exercise or a favorite coffee drink,” suggested Ghiloni.

“Winter is no excuse for not exercising, and our bodies are not designed to sit in a chair all day. In reality, winter time provides new opportunities. So, get out there and exercise,” concluded Ghiloni.

*The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,000 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.*

## FACT SHEET

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### **Winter Months and Most Health Conditions are No Excuse for Not Exercising**

#### **Keys to staying motivated**

- Set attainable goals
- Exercise with a friend or two
- Make it fun
- Try something new
- Reward yourself for accomplishing goals

#### **Safety precautions**

- Consult with a physician if you have heart conditions or asthma
- Wear layers
- Protect your hands, feet and ears
- Pay attention to weather conditions and wind chill
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Know the signs of frostbite and hypothermia
- Be careful on ponds and lakes; check the ice thickness before heading out

Source: *Bryan Ghiloni, M.D.*  
[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)