



TIPS FOR SAFE WINTER CAMPING

See also the 5 basic Survival Skills

CONSERVING BODY HEAT - THE PRIME OBJECTIVE!

There are three ways to lose body heat. Keeping them in mind will help you be more aware of what you are or could be doing to keep your body warm.

RADIATION

The emission of body heat, especially from skin areas as exposed to the elements. A good set of gloves, hat, and scarf can help best in keeping bare skin exposure to a minimum. It is said that as much as 90% of body heat is radiated through the head! Keep it covered!

CONDUCTION

The absorption of cold by the body when sitting or laying on cold ground, or handling cold objects such as metal cooking utensils and metal canteens. This is why a decent sleeping pad is required for cold weather camping. The same goes for wearing gloves. A camp stool is a must on a winter camping trip. Try not to sit on the ground.

CONVECTION

The loss of body heat due to wind blowing across unprotected body parts. This situation can also be reduced by keeping bare skin covered with hats, scarves, and gloves. It is important to keep exposure to a minimum, ESPECIALLY in a windy situation. Convection heat loss can reduce body heat the fastest. Wet clothing will accelerate this process, making staying dry even more important.

WATER CONSUMPTION IN COLD WEATHER

Dehydration can seriously impair the body's ability to produce heat. Drink fluids as often as possible during the day and keep a water bottle or canteen with you at night. When first feel thirsty, you are already a quart low! Other common symptoms of dehydration include headache and nausea.

COOKING IN COLD WEATHER

Cooking in cold weather will take about twice as long as normal. Always use a lid on any pots that you are cooking in. This will help to hold in the heat and decrease the overall heating time. Make sure you start heating cleaning water before you start cooking. The pots and utensils must still be cleaned. Try to keep your menu to hearty one-pot meals. Things like stews, chili, and hot beans stick to your ribs, lessen the cleaning time, and provide good sources of energy and good sources of fuel for your internal furnace. A good high calorie snack before bedtime will also help to keep you warm all night. Stay away from an overabundance of sugar. Sugar temporarily speeds up the metabolism. When the sugar is metabolized, the body's metabolism is suppressed, making one more susceptible to cold-weather

injuries. High-fat and high-protein snacks give the body a more even source of high energy. So, try a hunk of cheese as a good high calorie bedtime snack instead of a candy bar.

TENT PLACEMENT

Whenever possible, place your tent in a location that will catch the sunrise in the morning, this will aid in melting off any ice, and evaporating any frost or dew that may have formed during the night. This will also warm your tent as you awaken in the morning.

COLD AIR SINKS

Try to place your campsite on slightly higher ground than the rest of your surroundings. Try to choose a protected site if it is snowing or the wind is blowing.

SLEEPING TIP

Do not sleep with your mouth and nose in your sleeping bag. The moisture of your breath will condense in the bag, and cause it to become wet and ineffective as an insulator.

BUDDY SYSTEM

Buddies can help each other pack for a trek, look after one another in the woods, and watch for symptoms of frostbite, hypothermia, and exhaustion.

CHECKLIST

Make a checklist of everything you need before you start to pack. Then check each item off as you pack it. This way you will not forget anything.

KEEPING WARM

Keeping warm is the most important part of cold weather camping. Use the C-O-L-D method to assure staying warm.

C = Clean - Since insulation is only effective when heat is trapped by dead air spaces, keep your insulating layers clean and fluffy. Dirt, grime, and perspiration can mat down those air spaces and reduce the warmth of a garment.

O = Overheating - Avoid overheating by adjusting the layers of your clothing to meet the outside temperature and the exertions of your activities. Excessive sweating can dampen your garments and cause chilling later on.

L = Loose Layers - A steady flow of warm blood is essential to keep all parts of your body heated. Wear several loosely fitting layers of clothing and footwear that will allow maximum insulation without impeding your circulation.

D - Dry - Damp clothing and skin can cause your body to cool quickly, possibly leading to frostbite and hypothermia. Keep dry by avoiding cotton clothes that absorbs moisture. Always brush away snow that

is on your clothes before you enter a heated area. Keep the clothing around your neck loosened so that body heat and moisture can escape instead of soaking several layers of clothing.

Wear loose fitting clothing, to optimize insulation. Layering is the best method of dressing for winter activities. By dressing in layers, you can take off or add clothes as needed, depending on the weather and your activity. If you get warm you can take some off and if you get cold add some more clothing.

The most important thing to remember about cold weather camping is to KEEP DRY. Moisture will reduce the insulating properties of almost everything. Keep yourself dry, both from the weather and perspiration.

SHIRTS

Several shirts and sweaters worn over each other, each one larger than the one under it, is better than one heavy coat. Though it sounds like a lot, a sweatshirt, flannel shirt, another sweatshirt, a bulky sweater and a wind breaker, along with long underwear is not a bad combination. As the temperature and your activity changes you can take off or add shirts to stay comfortable and avoid sweating. The outer shirt or jacket should be of a material that will stop wind and shed snow. Some slick synthetics work well. If you have them, wool is excellent for the other layers.

PARKA

Your coat or parka is the most important piece of your winter clothing. It needs to be large enough to fit over extra clothing without cutting off blood flow, and allowing ventilation to keep moisture away from your body. A large permanently attached hood will prevent heat loss around your head and neck. The hood also keeps snow out of your neck.

UNDERWEAR

Start with thermal underwear. If at all possible, avoid cotton because it holds moisture next to your body and is NOT warm when damp. In very cold weather, 2 pair of long thermal pants and shirts may be appropriate. The second pair should fit loosely over the first.

PANTS

If you can, layer your pants. Wool is good. The outer pair of pants should shed snow and block wind. Some types of ski pants do both well. Jeans are not good in the cold weather. Snow sticks to them and soon they become wet. Coveralls and snowmobile suits are O.K., but it is more difficult to add and remove layers to regulate body temperature.

FOOTWEAR

As with other clothing, the layer system is also the answer for footwear. Start with a pair of silk, nylon, or thin wool socks next to your skin. Then layer on several pairs of heavier wool socks. When and if your feet become damp, change into another dry pair of socks at the first opportunity. Always put on fresh socks and your boots as soon as you get out of bed. That's the only way to get those cold boots warm before your feet freeze. Trying to warm them by the fire while you stand around in stocking feet is just plain stupid!

Wiggling your toes inside your boots will help keep feet warm. What ever you use, boots should NOT FIT TIGHT.

MITTENS AND GLOVES

Mittens allow your fingers to be in direct contact with each other, they will keep your hands warmer than regular gloves that cover each finger. Select mittens that are filled with foam insulation, or pull on wool gloves and cover them with a nylon over mitt. Long cuffs will keep wind and snow from getting in.

HEADGEAR

The stocking hat is the warmest thing you can cover your head with in cold weather. Get one that is large enough to pull down over your ears. Also ski masks are great in the winter and can help in keeping your neck and face warm as well. Noses and ears can be very easily frostbitten, so a scarf can be an invaluable item to have. Wear loose fitting clothing, to optimize insulation.

SLEEPWEAR

Never sleep in the same clothes that you have worn all day. They are damp and moist and will cause you to chill. This could cause frostbite and hypothermia. It is advised that you bring a thick pair of sweats and/or thermal underwear to sleep in. Keep the thermal and sweats for sleeping in only. Do not wear them during the day, this will keep them the driest. Also be sure to have a couple of layers of wool or heavy thick cotton socks on as well. Always sleep with a stocking hat on your head.

SUNGLASSES

Take and wear dark sunglasses if snow in the forecast. The glare of the sun off the snow could lead to snow blindness. The sunglasses will reduce the glare.

SLEEPING BAG

Your sleeping bag needs to be a winter rated bag. Down is lighter for the amount of insulation, but it's more expensive, needs special care, and loses its insulating value when wet. I don't recommend down for anything but major mountaineering expeditions. It is also a very good idea to have some kind of sleeping mat to use in the winter. The mat can be a piece of high density rubber foam at least one inch thick.

In cold weather camping you never want to sleep on an air mattress or off the ground in a cot. The air under you will cool you off in no time and this would create a seriously life threatening situation. If you don't have a sleeping mat, bring a spare wool or natural fiber blanket to use as a pad under your sleeping bag. The sleeping mat is worth it's weight in gold. Whatever you sleep in, you need to be insulated from the ground or snow. A good rule of thumb is that you want 2 to 3 times the insulation below you as you have over you. A closed cell foam pad (usually blue) is essential to get you away from the cold snow and ground. Open cell foam (the familiar old foam rubber) also makes good insulation, but absorbs moisture.

Use a ground cloth to keep ground moisture from your bag. Your body will warm up snow and frozen ground to a point where moisture can become a serious problem. A plastic sheet or tarp works best. Plastic trash bags will work and if they tear trying to get them up -- no big deal.

Space blankets make good wind shields only. The metallic properties take over the insulation properties in cold weather and become cold conductors. If used as a ground cloth, they will not reflect the body heat. Instead it will conduct the cold from the ground to your body.

PLEASE NOTE:

The information above has come from various sources and is believed to be accurate.

I am not able to confirm the accuracy of the above, nor do I assume to be an expert in this field.

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