Snow Days & Exercise

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Everyone looks forward to a snow day, right? Getting an unexpected day off from school or work is always exciting. The good news is that you don't have to miss a workout if you are snowed in.

Playing in the snow is actually a great full-body workout. Simply walking through snow increases your calorie burn by 60 percent compared to walking on a paved road, according to Bill McArdle, an exercise physiologist and advisor to Weight Watchers International. Other snow day activities, such as shoveling snow, skiing, sledding, even building snowmen are all great exercise, and being outside in the cold naturally increases your calorie burn because your body has to work harder to stay warm.

In addition to simply playing in the snow, there are also specific exercises you can do using the snow as resistance. For example, the "foot drag" in which you stand in the snow and step to the left, dragging your right foot in front of your body through the snow. Then reverse it, stepping to the right, dragging your left foot through the snow to the right. You can also do walking lunges in the snow. Be sure to keep your abs pulled in tight to work the core as well as your lower body. Even making snow angels is a great total-body exercise. Just be sure to keep your arms and legs as straight and extended as possible to get as much resistance as you can.

If being outside in the cold is not your thing, there are still plenty of indoor exercises you can do if you are snowed in and can't get to the gym. A callisthenic workout is done using your body weight as resistance – no other equipment needed. Calisthenics can help a person gain tremendous functional strength and can also aid in sculpting a lean body.

Push-ups are one of the best body-weight exercises, and there are a few variations. There is the standard pushup with which most people are familiar – if you workout regularly, these may not be challenging enough, so try a one-handed variation or pushups on a BOSU or medicine ball, if you have one in your home.

There are many ab exercises that can be done at home without any equipment other than your own body. Traditional crunches or sit-ups are good options, of course, but you can also do bicycles (where you touch your right elbow to your left knee and vice versa) or do a V-sit (pulling the abs in very tight and balancing for 30 to 60 seconds or longer).

Planks are also an excellent body-weight exercise. You can do them low, balancing on your forearms and tips of your toes, or high with your palms flat on the floor and your arms fully extended. You can also do side planks, balanced on one arm with the other arm extended. Do both types for 30 to 60 seconds or longer.

There are also lots of exercises to raise your heart rate. Think jumping jacks, jogging in place and jump squats – to name just a few. Add a weight vest (if you have one) to make all of these exercises more challenging.

A snow day is a great opportunity to try some new exercises and bring some variety to your normal fitness routine.