

Cold Weather Countdown

Some of us look forward to things cooling off, and some of us are sad about the end of warm temperatures, but regardless of how we feel about it, cold weather *is* coming. What plans and preparations can we make now so we can create better health and more enjoyment in the chilly months ahead? Whether you're new to this neck of the woods, or have shoveled mountains of snow, it's time to start the Cold--Weather Countdown!



10. The Right Clothes

What's more miserable than being cold? Being cold and damp. Getting set with the right kind of clothes can go a long way in keeping you safe and comfortable. Remember the old adage: There's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing choices! For tips, check out [How To Dress for Winter Weather](#).

9. Get the Gear!

Now that you're dressed, it's time to get outside. Everyone needs ice cleats for their boots. They make a big difference in balance and stability. How about a thermos? Hand/foot warmers? Boot trays and a dryer?

8. Explore winter sports.

Try before you buy. Renting can be a good way to explore all your options, then you can invest in the ones you really enjoy. There's so much to do during a North Woods winter: snowshoeing, skiing, ice fishing, skating...Pick something new and give it a go!

7. Get your car and home ready too.

Safety and comfort are important beyond our clothing choices. Check out [Winter Car Care Tips: Keep Your Vehicle in Peak Condition During Frigid Weather](#) and [15 Ways to Prepare Your Home for Winter](#).

6. Top off your tank.

Winter nutrition isn't really different from that of summer. Plenty of veggies and fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, and a little fat will get you where you want to go. Check out "[Nutrition For Winter](#)

[Activities: A Beginner's Guide](#)" for more information.

Remember to hydrate! It's important, regardless hot (or not) the weather is.

5. Companionship

Summertime made getting together with friends and family easier. As we move into our second COVID winter, we may need to dust off the connection skills that we developed last year. If we get creative, cold weather + COVID doesn't have to equal isolation.

4. Entertain your brain.

Here's a good rule of thumb: If your days are desk-bound, balance that by unwinding with some physical activity. If your days are very physically active, recover with more restful activities in the evening. Movie marathons can be great, but maybe not every evening. What are some different ways to relax? When is the last time you checked out our amazing public library? Played a board game? Tried a video game? Explored a new craft?

3. Look for the light.

Make sure you're taking advantage of every bit of daylight: morning tea by a window, lunch-time walks, mid-afternoon sunshine breaks. Light therapy boxes can be helpful too. Even with those measures, the short days of winter can be difficult for some people. Stay alert for the signs of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Check out the back of this sheet for more information.

2. Get your flu shot.

The flu is [serious business](#). It's can lead to pneumonia, myocarditis (inflammation of the heart), encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), sepsis (a life-threatening response to an infection), and even death. On top of that, we need to keep our healthcare system available for people with other illnesses, including COVID. Speaking of which...

1. Get your COVID vaccine!

They're safe and highly effective at preventing serious illness, hospitalization, and death. Register at www.cookcountycovid19.org/

Taking care of ourselves can take a lot of support.
Ask a nurse or provider if you'd like to talk.

We're here to help!
218-387-2330



Winter and Vitamin D

Vitamin D protects us from diseases such as osteoporosis, heart disease, and cancers of the breast, prostate, and colon. It can also protect us from

depression, insomnia, and an overactive immune system.

Vitamin D is [produced in our bodies](#) when the sun's UV-B rays hit our skin, but there are a number of things that can impact the way that works:

- Time of day — If your shadow is longer than your body height, the sun is too low in the sky for enough UV light to get through the atmosphere.
- Season — winter-time sun has less UV light.
- Latitude — people that live more than 37 degrees north of the equator (north of Atlanta) don't get enough winter UV light.
- Altitude — there are more UV rays at higher altitudes.
- Skin color — darker skin is protected from skin cancer, but less able to absorb UV rays.
- Weather conditions — clouds can block UV light.
- Air pollution — decreases the amount of UV light.

There are two ways that people can get more Vitamin D in the winter: Food and Supplements.

Foods that provide Vitamin D include:

- ✓ Mushrooms that have been exposed to UV light
- ✓ Fortified milk products (either animal or plant sourced)
- ✓ Sardines, canned salmon, and other fish
- ✓ Liver
- ✓ Egg yolks

If you'd like to dive deeper into food sources of Vitamin D, visit the [USDA National Nutrient Database](#).

What about supplements?

Supplementation needs to be done judiciously. According to SMC's Medical Director, Dr. Paul Terril, "More is not better. There is really no evidence that supplementing Vitamin D is beneficial as long as one is not deficient. One thousand units per day is fine for most people - unless they have proven deficiency."

Additionally, remember that just because a supplement is for sale doesn't mean that it's been certified by the Food and Drug Administration as actually containing what's on the label or that it's been checked for contamination. Make sure that the product you choose has been third-party verified by either NSF International, ConsumerLab.com, or US Pharmacopeia (USP). Check out Consumer Reports' ["Supplement Watch"](#) to learn more.

Winter and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

For some people, autumn and winter can be short on sunshine and long on depression. It's thought that a decrease in the number of daylight hours triggers changes in the ways that the brain works, and these changes then lead to feelings of depression. Symptoms may start out mild as the days begin to shorten, then become worse as the season goes on.

From time to time, everyone feels down, but if you are experiencing any of the [symptoms](#) below, it's time to reach out.

- Feel depressed for days at a time,
- Can't get motivated to do things you used to enjoy,
- Having low energy,
- Weight gain or changes in appetite, especially cravings for high-carbohydrate foods,
- Having problems with sleeping, especially oversleeping,
- Are using alcohol for comfort or relaxation,
- Feel worthless, guilty, or hopeless or are contemplating self-harm or suicide.



The Happy News - SAD is treatable! Things that help may [include:](#)

- Exposure to more light— this could be spending more time outside or near a sunny window, or using special "sunshine" lights.
- Exercise—being active often helps alleviate feelings of depression.
- Nutrition—meals that are well-balanced help keep emotions better balanced.
- Avoiding alcohol and other drugs—in the long run, they can just make depression worse.
- Keeping goals realistic in light of the depression. Break large tasks into smaller ones, set priorities, and get done what you can.
- Delaying big decisions until you're feeling better and more objective.
- Antidepressants can help correct the chemical imbalances that may be causing SAD.
- Psychotherapy can help you to identify and change thoughts that contribute to harmful "feedback loops." It can also help you improve relationship skills, and develop plans to manage stressful situations.

If SAD becomes part of your fall or winter life, please make an appointment with a Medical or Behavioral Health provider here at Sawtooth Mountain Clinic. Just call 218-387-2330 to get set up.