

5 Steps to Enjoy Smart Winter Walking

Green fitness is a way to improve your personal health and minimize your use of resources. Driving five miles to the gym for an hour's walk on an electric treadmill uses fossil fuels, contributes to pollution, and uses up your financial resources. A greener, cheaper way to get fit is to take an hour's walk right outside your front door.

1. Choose smart clothes for your body.

Walking experts have 3 main recommendations for comfort in colder weather. (1) Dress in layers. Several thin layers are better than bulky layers. (2) Wear a hat; go with soft and warm rather than itchy or scratchy. Without a hat, heat is lost off your head and you'll cool more quickly. (3) Wear gloves or even better mittens, which keep your hands warmer.

2. Choose smart shoes and stuff for your feet.

For both comfort and safety, footwear is critically important. Sturdy boots or walking shoes with thick soles and deep treads are essential. Choose footwear to fit cold weather socks. Start with a pair of thick wool or synthetic socks; add thin, inner socks when it's really cold. If your winter walks are frequently icy or snowy, get a pair of slip-on grips or ice-trax.

3. Choose smart companions for fun and safety.

It's always nice to have a walking companion; family, friends, and dogs are all wonderful. Walking with family or friends provides bonding time and lively conversations make the miles seem shorter in any season. In winter, a companion also provides an added measure of safety in the event that you slip or fall (less likely with the footwear described above).

4. Choose smart accessories for every walk.

Visibility is a concern for winter walkers and people who need to see them. Drivers have difficulty seeing due to shorter days, blowing snow, or glare on sunny days. You and your pet can walk safely with LED lights and/or reflective clothing. For under \$15, you can buy bright LED lights and reflective vests, hats, gloves, belts, and dog leashes or collars.

5. Choose smart choices for your route.

Finding a safe walking route is critical in any season. Routes that are perfect in spring, summer, and fall may not work in winter due to snow, ice, sleet, or rain. Look for trails that drain well or are maintained for winter use. If you live in a snowy part of the country, learn which sidewalks and parking areas are usually the first to be cleared after a storm.