

COLD WEATHER CAMPING TIPS

Cold weather conditions make the proper choice and use of clothing more vital than at other times of the year. As you prepare your cold weather clothing, keep warm by following the guidelines that spell the word COLD.

C-CLEAN

Since insulation is 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 your layers of clothing to meet the outside temperature and exertions of your activities. Excessive sweating can dampen your clothing 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 or hypothermia. Keep dry by avoiding cotton clothing that absorbs moisture, brushing snow from your clothes before it melts, and loosening the clothing around your neck and chest. Since body heat can drive perspiration through layers of breathable cloth and force it out into the air, don't wear waterproof clothes.

Wool clothing is ideal in cold weather because it is durable and water resistant, and even when soaked it can keep you warm. Wool makes excellent blankets, socks, hats, mittens, sweaters, and even pants. Many synthetics are also good in winter for use as windbreakers and insulation. Remember that winter camping is not a fashion show. Whatever combination of clothing it takes to keep you warm should be worn, regardless of how it looks.

Footwear is important in winter camping as your feet are subject to more exposure to moisture especially if it's not to cold out and snow is melting. At least two pairs of socks are recommended as long as they aren't too tight. Wool or wool blend is best.

Mittens that allow your fingers to be in direct contact with one another can keep your hands warmer than gloves that isolate each finger. A good pair of gloves is a must however for many tasks around camp that would be too cumbersome with mittens. Extra gloves and/or mittens are a must, as they tend to get very wet.

Stocking hats are great for wear outdoors and at night in your sleeping bag. Even better is a stocking hat long enough to cover your head and neck, and all of your face except your eyes. A coat with a hood is also helpful, as is a scarf around your neck that can be used to cover your face if needed.

To test your clothing to see if it will keep you warm, put on the clothing you are going to pack then go outside and sit in the yard for a couple of hours. If your clothing will keep you warm while sitting then you will have no problem staying warm while moving around camp. Be sure to pack enough extra clothes in case you get too wet.

Sleeping

Your first line of defense is your shelter such as a tent, lean-to or snow shelter. Keep in mind that a tent is not designed to keep you warm. It is a defense against wind and precipitation. With this in mind, it is important to keep your tent ventilation system open at night so that the vapor your body gives off at night can escape. Put plastic under the tent to prevent melting snow from soaking through the tent floor.

Next you need to insulate your body from the ground. The best method is a foam pad. The closed cell pads work the best for this, as they don't absorb water. Open cell pads enclosed in a waterproof shell are even better but more expensive. More than one pad can be used.

Your sleeping bag is the next defense. The function of a sleeping bag is to trap body heat in a small area while letting body moisture out. You can use the same layering method with sleeping bags as you use with clothing. As long as your clothes are not wet you can wear anything in your sleeping bag as you normally would outside. You can also add a blanket or two inside your sleeping bag. Wool is best. Remember to not make it too tight.

Wear a stocking hat to prevent heat loss from your head if your sleeping bag is not a mummy bag with a hood. Never put your head into your bag. The moisture in your breath will soak your bag.

You can also use your sleeping bag to keep things from freezing like cameras, water bottles and your boots. They can be put into plastic bags and placed under the foot of your sleeping bag or inside the bag if there is room. Remember to brush all the snow off your boots.