

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

## COLD WEATHER COMFORT & SAFETY

Cold weather camping as defined by BSA is "camping in weather where the average daily temperature is below **50 degrees Fahrenheit** and conditions are cold, wet or windy."

The most important thing to remember about cold weather camping is to **KEEP DRY**. Moisture will reduce the insulating properties of almost everything. To keep yourself warm, remember the word **COLD**.

**C** keep yourself and your clothes Clean.

**O** avoid Overheating.

**L** wear clothes loose and in Layers.

**D** keep Dry.

## TYPES OF COLD

1. Wet cold: 50° F to 14° F The most dangerous. Wide temperature variations from melting during the day to freezing at night makes proper dressing difficult, and important. Damp conditions from melting snow or rain makes keeping dry difficult.
2. Dry cold: 14° F to -20° F Ground is frozen and snow is dry and crystallized. Strong winds cause the most concern with keeping warm. Extra clothing layers and wind-proof outer garments should be added.
3. Arctic cold: below -20° F Requires the most insulation and wind-proofing. Many materials change physical properties, becoming brittle. Only for the most experienced campers.

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

## LOSS OF BODY HEAT IN COLD WEATHER

**Homeostasis** - The body's process for maintaining an even temperature. The arms and legs are used as a radiator to remove excess heat from the body. This process dilates the blood vessels, allowing more blood to flow to the skin surfaces. When the body temperature drops, these blood vessels constrict, decreasing blood flow, and thereby, heat loss. This is why hands and feet get numb when cold, and why they're particularly vulnerable to frostbite. Since your brain needs oxygen to function, your body can't cut off the flow of blood to your head in order to conserve heat. Consequently, much of your body heat can be lost through an uncovered head and neck.

**Radiation.** (55%) A major source of heat loss. Heat is lost directly from exposed skin and the head. The head may lose up to one-half of the body's total heat production at 40 degrees F, and up to three-quarters at 5 degrees F.

**Conduction.** (15% w/convection) Heat is lost through skin contact with cold objects, primarily the hands, and wet or tight clothing. Handling gasoline, and other super-cooled liquids, at low temperatures is especially dangerous.

**Convection.** Heat is lost from the wind carrying away heat from the surface of the skin. This includes wind-chill effects.

**Evaporation.** (21%) Loss from evaporation of sweat, moisture from the skin and lungs produces substantial heat loss. This is little that can be done about this. We need to allow for this by using breathable fabrics to allow this moisture to pass out freely.

**Respiration.** (2-9%) Heat lost from inhaling cold air and exhaling warm air.

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

## COLD WEATHER CLOTHING

Select the proper type and amount of clothing for the activity you are engaged in. Regulate your clothing according to your activity rate. This is the most effective way to ensure comfort. Pay attention to your body's signals. Don't wait until you are cold to put on more clothing. Act when you first begin to feel cooler. Cotton should never be worn against skin in cold weather – it absorbs and holds perspiration against the skin and when it evaporates robs the body of heat. Polyester or polypropylene blends wick moisture and are the best base layer.

1. Layer your clothing. Wear several layers of lighter clothing instead of one heavy layer. This way you can better regulate the amount of insulation. If you get warm you can take layers off and add some more clothing layers if you get cold.

### Clothing layers (top)

- a. Long, thermal underwear. polypropylene
- b. Shirt or inner layer
- c. Sweater, sweatshirt, light jacket
- d. Wind or rain gear

### Clothing layers (bottom)

- a. Long, thermal underwear. polypropylene
- b. Inner pants cotton, wool, wool blend
- c. Wind or rain pants if needed
- d. Wicking inner socks polypropylene or wool blend
- e. Insulating socks wool or wool blend (Always pack an extra pair)
- f. Footwear, boots waterproof, loose-fitting, or snow boots

### Head coverings

### Gloves and mittens

2. Keep yourself dry, both from the weather and perspiration.
3. Wear loose fitting clothing on outer layers to optimize insulation
4. Remember when buying clothes for cold weather that wool retains most of its insulation properties when wet, while cotton loses most of its insulation when wet.
5. There are also excellent manmade fibers and insulation that retain their insulation properties as good as or better than wool. Other benefits include light-weight, wide design options & wind-blocking.

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

6. Remember your rain gear is water proof and will not allow perspiration to exit. During rainy weather change your clothing several times a day.
7. Athletic shoes and nylon hiking boots do not provide enough insulation. You should wear either water-proof boots, water-proofed leather hiking boots, rubber overshoes or rubberized boots.
8. Remember water resistant is not the same as waterproof. Lightweight synthetic materials such as Goretex are preferable to leather boots. Leather hiking boots can be waterproofed with the appropriate commercial treatment. Be sure to use only silicon-based products on leathers which require it. Check the care tag that came with the boots.
9. If you choose to wear rubberized boots, remember they do not allow for ventilation, therefore you will need to change your socks several times a day. Also you may want to get some felt inserts for insulation.
10. Pull trouser legs over top of shoes to keep out rain/snow. You may want to use nylon gaiters (leggings) if hiking long distances in deep snow.
11. Wear mittens instead of fingered gloves when you do not need independent use of your fingers. This will allow the fingers to help keep each other warm.
12. Use a pair of socks to cover hands if mittens get wet.
13. Wear a stocking cap or other warm hat. One that covers the ears and neck area is particularly effective. Remember, most heat loss is through the head. Wearing a warm hat warms the rest of your body, too.
14. Wear a scarf to reduce heat loss around the neck. Use a "ski mask" or scarf over your face for protection from the cold and wind.
15. If you need a fire to keep you warm you are not dressed properly. If the heat can get to your body, so can the cold.
16. Paper is a good insulator and can be wrapped around the body (under your clothes) to add insulation.

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

## COLD WEATHER NUTRITION

### High Points:

- Avoid Caffeine
- Lots of water
- Balance of sugars, starches, proteins - It takes very little time to process sugars into heat, longer for starches and the longest for proteins.
  - Sugars will generate internal heat for the first couple of hours
  - starches in the middle stage of the night and
  - proteins in the early morning hours.
- Limit drinking after dinner time

### Meals

Avoid taking fresh food in the winter (fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs). These all contain water and weigh a lot (and you have enough to carry). The exception to this is cheese, butter, or meats (needed for their high fat content). Take mostly dry foods (cereal, pasta, rice, wheat, oatmeal,) baked goods (brownies, cookies), or freeze dried foods (expensive but very lightweight and quick to cook which can save on stove fuel).

**1. Breakfast** - should not be a complicated meal but should be a complete one since it supplies the foundation for a full day's work. Time is also a factor since you probably want to get up and moving. Just standing around in camp in the early morning (cold) hours only leads to cold feet and bodies. Since the easiest thing to cook is water it is best to go for items which can be made in each individual's cup. Suggestions include: instant oatmeal with hot milk & margarine, hot Tang, Granola with hot milk, hot Jello, hot chocolate with extra milk & margarine.

It is best to supplement some of these items with extra powdered milk to add additional protein and margarine for fats. This is the meal to be careful *not* to dump too much sugar into the bloodstream at once, but rather to eat a good mix of all three major food types. The sugars will get you started and the proteins and fats will keep you going through the morning.

**2. Lunch** - There are two approaches to lunch on a winter trip. One is to stop for a traditional lunch and take a long break. This means cessation of activity which can lead to people getting cold. Additional layers would need to be put on and taken off. All of this adds up to a lot of time. But this also allows time for exploring an area and taking it easy. You can break out the stove and cook up a hot meal if you like. The other approach is carrying a personal lunch which can be eaten throughout the day, at scenic points, water stops, clothing breaks, etc. The second approach minimizes the amount of time people would be standing around, but also doesn't provide a major

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

rest stop. In both cases you should include all the food groups by having some of the following items: meats, cheeses, nuts, dried fruit, raisins, cookies, candy, granola bars.

In the case of an "eat through the day lunch" a general formula is to take the following per person per day:

- 1/2 - 3/4 lb. GORP - raisins, peanuts, M&M's, sourballs coconut, chocolate morsels etc.
- 1/4 - 1/2 lb. Lunch Meat and/or Cheese - cut into bite size chunks so you don't break your teeth
- Other items include cookies, brownies, peanut butter, bagels, etc.

**3. Dinner** - It is often good to start dinner with an instant soup or a hot drink that can be made in each persons' cup. This gives some internal warmth while waiting for the main course. In the winter, the main dish is usually some form of one pot glop/stew. This is to save time and stove fuel. A glop starts with a soup or gravy base, and includes a starch (rice, noodles), some vegetables (frozen vegetables keep well on winter trips), whatever protein you are carrying (lunch meat, cheese, canned chicken, tuna). This should be spiced to make it tasty. Remember, at the end of the day you will be more tired than hungry and having an interesting meal is essential to get you to eat.

The other approach to dinner is freeze-dried foods. These have the advantage of simply adding the dish to boiling water so less fuel is needed and they weigh very little. There are a number of companies offering these items. They are generally more expensive than what you would pay for basic staples like rice & noodles. Be aware of portion size. Some companies give an unrealistically high estimate on how many their meal pack will feed.

The meal is concluded with hot drinks (tang, tea, hot chocolate, jello etc.) and possibly dessert. At the end of the meal water should be melted/heated up for personal water bottles at night.

Dehydrated foods (which are different than freeze dried *are not* recommended because they require large quantities of water to rehydrate them.

**4. Food for sleeping** – Before bed, try eating proteins. The protein will be broken down more slowly so the heat will be released over a longer period of time. If you eat a sugar, you will get a quick "heat high" and then your body temperature will drop back down, sometimes falling below its previous level.

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

## SLEEPING IN COLD WEATHER

1. Natural fiber sleeping bags do not maintain their insulation properties when wet. Synthetic bags such as will take care of most of your needs.
2. A mummy style bag is warmer than a rectangular, as there is less space for your body to heat. Also, most mummy bags have a hood to help protect your head.
3. If you only have a rectangular sleeping bag, bring an extra blanket to pack around your shoulders in the opening to keep air from getting in.
4. Do not sleep with your head under the covers. Doing so will increase the humidity in the bag that will reduce the insulation properties of the bag and increase dampness.
5. Remember to air out your sleeping bag and tent, when weather permits. Perspiration and breath condense in the tent at night and the water will reduce insulating properties of your bag.
6. Wear a stocking cap to bed in order to reduce heat loss.
7. Wear a loose fitting hooded pull over type sweatshirt to sleep in – but avoid cotton against the skin..
8. An inexpensive fleece or wicking bag liner will greatly enhance the sleeping bag's warmth.
9. Insulate yourself from the ground as much as possible to avoid cold spots at the shoulders and hips.
10. Use a sleeping pad of closed cell foam instead of an air mattress.
11. A good rule of thumb is that you want 2 to 3 times the insulation below you as you have over you.
12. Use a ground cloth to keep ground moisture from your bag. Your body will warm up frozen ground to a point where moisture can become important.

## Cold Weather Camping Tips

13. Space blankets, if used as a ground cloth, will not reflect the body heat. Instead it will conduct the cold from the ground to your body.
14. Put a hand warmer (in a sock) at the foot of your sleeping bag before getting into it.
15. Fill a canteen with hot water (not boiling) and place at foot of bag to keep warm. Be careful with plastic canteens.
16. Exercise before bedding down to increase body heat. This will help to warm your bag quicker. Be careful not to start perspiring.
17. Remove the clothes you are wearing before bedding down if they are damp with perspiration. Put on dry base layer or pajamas before entering the sleeping bag.
18. Hang your sleeping bag up or just lay it out, between trips, so the filling will not compress and lose its insulating properties.
19. Before you get out of bed bring the clothes you plan to wear inside your bag and warm them up some before dressing.



# Cold Weather Camping Tips

## ODDS AND ENDS

1. If at night you get cold, let the adult leadership know so action can be taken before injury from cold weather health problems occur.
2. Organization and proper preparation is very important in cold weather camping. Good meals, proper clothing, shelter and comfortable sleeping arrangements make for an enjoyable outing.
3. Drink 2 quarts of fluids per day besides what you drink at meals.
4. Learn to recognize and treat cold weather health problems. These include frostbite, hypothermia, dehydration, chilblains, trench foot, snow blindness and carbon monoxide poisoning.
5. Use the buddy system to check each other for cold weather health problems. Notify the adult leadership if symptoms do occur.
6. If you feel cold gather some wood or do some other type of work. Working will help warm you.
7. Eating ice or snow can reduce your body temperature and it is not pure. Don't eat it. Snow and ice can be used for drinking water but only after boiling.
8. No open flames (candles, matches, etc.) inside the tents. Wiggling your toes inside your boots will help keep feet warm. If your feet get cold put on a dry pair of warm socks..
9. Use the disposable hand warmers sparingly. While they are useful for heating extremities (fingers and toes), they are not a substitute for proper layered clothing.
10. Keep off ice on streams, lakes and ponds.
11. It takes longer to cook food in cold weather, so plan accordingly. Before going to bed pour enough water for breakfast into a pot. It is easier to heat the pot than a plastic water can.

## Cold Weather Camping Tips

12. If hiking, keep your matches in a metal match safe. Carry extra matches because the more you need a fire to warm up the less likely you will be able to start one easily.
13. Gather twice as much fuel as you think you'll need for fires.
14. Carry tinder from home. It may be hard to find in snow or wet conditions.
15. Gather your wood and tinder for the morning fire in the evening so that you will be able to start the fire quickly in the morning.
16. Space blankets make good wind shields only. The metallic properties take over the insulation properties in cold weather and become cold conductors.
17. Carry extra plastic trash bags in cold weather. They can be used as personal wind shields and ponchos by slitting a hole in the top for your head to go through.
18. Flashlight batteries are affected by cold. You can revive a dead battery by warming it up near (not in) the fire.

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

## COLD WEATHER HEALTH PROBLEMS AND FIRST AID

**Dehydration** - Excessive loss of body water. Impairs the ability to reason, so the victim may not react properly.

### Prevention:

1. Drink at least 2 quarts of water a day.
2. Avoid dehydrating foods (high protein) and fluids (coffee, caffeine).
3. Increase fluid intake at first signs of darker yellow urine.

### Symptoms:

#### 1 to 5 % deficiency

1. Increased pulse rate
2. Nausea and loss of appetite
3. Dark urine or constipation
4. Irritability, fatigue
5. Thirst

#### 6 to 10 % deficiency

1. Headache, dizziness
2. Labored breathing
3. Tingling
4. Absence of salivation
5. Inability to walk
6. Cyanosis (bluish or grayish skin color)

#### 11 to 20 % deficiency

1. Swollen tongue, inability to swallow
2. Dim vision, deafness

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

3. Shriveled, numb skin
4. Painful urination
5. Delirium, unconsciousness and death

## **Treatment:**

Mild cases - drink liquids, keep warm.

More severe cases require professional medical treatment.

**Hypothermia** - Lowering of the inner core temperature of the body. Can and usually does happen above freezing. The victim may not recognize the symptoms and may not be able to think clearly enough to react. Injury or death may result.

## **Predisposing Conditions:**

1. Poor physical condition.
2. Inadequate nutrition and water intake.
3. Thin build.
4. Nonprotective clothing.
5. Getting wet.
6. Inadequate protection from wind, rain and snow.
7. Exhaustion.

## **Symptoms:**

1. Loss of ability to reason.
2. Shivering.
3. Slowing, drowsiness, fatigue.
4. Stumbling.
5. Thickness of speech.
6. Amnesia.

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

7. Irrationality, poor judgment.
8. Hallucinations.
9. Cyanosis (blueness of skin).
10. Dilation of pupils of eyes.
11. Decreased heart and respiration rate.
12. Stupor.

## **Treatment:**

1. Shelter the victim from wind and weather.
2. Insulate the victim from the ground.
3. Change wet clothing.
4. Put on windproof, waterproof gear.
5. Increase exercise, if possible.
6. Put in a pre-warmed sleeping bag.
7. Give hot drinks, followed by candy or other high-sugar foods.
8. Apply external heat; hot stones, hot canteens.
9. Huddle for body heat from others.
10. Place victim in a tub of 105° F water. Never above 110° F.

## **Prevention:**

1. Keep rested, maintain good nutrition.
2. Consume plenty of high-energy food.
3. Use proper clothing.
4. Make camp early if tired, injured or lost.
5. Get plenty of exercise. Don't sit around much.
6. Appoint an experienced person to watch the group for signs.

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

7. Take immediate corrective action for any signs.

**Frostbite** - Tissue injury involving the actual freezing of the skin and underlying tissues. Recovery is slow, severe frostbite can lead to gangrene. Once exposed the victim will be predisposed toward frostbite in the future.

## **Predisposing Conditions:**

1. Prolonged exposure to temperatures 32° F or below.
2. Brief exposure at extremely low temperatures, -25° F and below.
3. Exposed body parts
4. Restriction of circulation.
5. Fatigue, poor nutrition, low liquid intake, poor physical condition.
6. Previous case of frostbite or other cold injury.

## **Symptoms:**

### **First Degree (Frostnip)**

1. Redness, pain, burning, stinging or prickly sensation.
2. Pain disappears and there is a sudden blanching of the skin.
3. The skin may look mottled.
4. Skin is firm to the touch, but resilient underneath.
5. On thawing, there is aching pain or brownness. The skin may peel off, and the part may remain cold for some time.

### **Second Degree (Superficial Frostbite, Frostbite)**

1. No pain, the part may feel dead.
2. Numbness, hard to move the part.
3. Tissue and layers underneath are hard to the touch.

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

4. After thawing (takes 3 to 20 days) pain, large blisters, sweating.
5. Black or discolored skin sloughs off, leaving tender new skin.

## **Third degree (Severe Frostbite)**

1. Full thickness of the skin is involved.
2. After thawing, pain continues for 2 to 5 weeks.

## **Fourth degree (Severe Frostbite)**

1. Skin and bone are frozen.
2. Swelling and sweating occur.
3. Gangrene may develop, amputation may be necessary.

## **Treatment:**

1. Do not attempt to thaw frozen limbs in the field. Evacuate immediately to proper health care. Thawing only risks additional injury and the victim will be in too much pain to walk.
2. Check for hypothermia.

## **Prevention:**

1. Proper clothing.
2. Good nutrition, drink water, maintain core temperature.
3. Use buddy system to check face, nose, and ears.
4. Immediate treatment of minor symptoms.

**Snow Blindness** - Inflammation of the eye caused by exposure to reflected ultraviolet rays when the sun is shining brightly on an expanse of snow.

## **Symptoms:**

Sensation of grit in the eyes, made worse by eye movement, watering, redness, headache, and increased pain on exposure to light.

# Cold Weather Camping Tips

## **Treatment:**

Blindfold the victim and get rest. Further exposure should be avoided. If unavoidable, the eyes should be protected with dark bandages or the darkest sunglasses.

The condition heals in a few days without permanent damage once exposure is stopped.

## **Prevention:**

Wear sunglasses when any danger is present. Do not wait for discomfort to begin.