Stay Active… Even in Winter!

With the intense cold of recent weeks, it can be difficult to stay active outside. However, with some helpful tips, it’s possible to be comfortable in the outdoors, even in the cold temperatures that we have experienced in the beginning of the year. So whether you are looking for new activities to achieve your 2014 resolutions or simply ideas for staying active during the winter, this publication will inspire you. You will find suggestions of activities available to all and a section on how to stay comfortable while doing them.

Nordic Walking

Nordic walking is not very well known in North America or in Québec, but it is quite popular in Europe. It originated in the Scandinavian countries in the 20th century. Nordic walking is a form of fitness walking with specially designed poles that propel a walker in the manner of a cross-country skier.

In this way, all the body’s main muscle and joint groups are used, which makes it a much more effective form of exercise than conventional walking. Tests have shown that this technique increases oxygen and caloric consumption by 20 to 50%. In addition, 30 minutes of Nordic walking is equivalent to 50 minutes of conventional walking with respect to energy consumption.

It is also said that Nordic walking is easier on the knees than jogging and that it is enormously beneficial in that it brings about weight loss, improves the cardiovascular system and tones the muscles. In addition, the use of poles reduces joint stress.

The technique used in Nordic walking is simple: slip your hands into the wrist-straps of your walking poles and take long strides at a normal pace, with your body leaning forward.

Bring your right hand forward, open and relaxed, at the same time as your left foot. At this point, the right pole is dragged along the ground. Then, grip the pole handle, lean on it while driving it into the ground and move yourself forward at the same time.

However, this basic technique requires a good deal of practice to be mastered.

With practice, you will walk faster, be steadier on your feet and you will automatically adopt the proper posture with your shoulders relaxed and down and your back straight.
Nordic walking should not be done on paved or concrete surfaces, so avoid asphalted surfaces.

Nordic walking poles should be light, resistant and flexible enough to absorb shocks. They are made of carbon fibre or fibreglass and other composite materials. Aluminium is not recommended, because it is too fragile and not flexible enough. When buying your poles, talk to a salesperson to choose the appropriate weight, material and length.

Lastly, as an exercise, Nordic walking is suitable for everyone because it is inexpensive and very enjoyable.

**Snowshoeing**

Snowshoeing is simple and accessible. Its popularity has been growing, especially in recent years.

- It’s a simple activity that requires no technical training.
- It can be practised by people of all ages, regardless of their physical condition (the terrain, vertical drop and length of the trail can be chosen accordingly).
- It’s a sport you can practise at your own pace, individually or in a group.
- Snowshoes are relatively inexpensive.
- Snowshoeing is a sport that exercises all the muscles of the body.
- It increases cardiovascular capacity and tones the lower limbs.
- Poles provide support and balance. The arm and abdominal muscles are also used.
- Snowshoeing burns more than three times as many calories as walking.

**Staying warm in winter**

If you’re sensitive to the cold and the cold prevents you from engaging in winter activities, here are a few tips on how to keep warm without feeling uncomfortably hot. To do this, you need proper clothing, of course, but you must also know how to conserve heat and make the most of the heat generated by exercise and food.

**How to dress**

- Dressing in layers is the most effective way of keeping warm.
- Synthetic fibres preserve heat more efficiently than cotton.
- Wool also keeps the body warm.
- Certain waterproof fabrics (oilcloth, urethane-coated nylon, PVC, etc.) and other types of fabric are also very effective because they prevent humidity from penetrating while allowing moisture vapour to escape (Gore-Tex, Helly Tech, Climate, etc).

The more we keep our bodies warm, the more heat will circulate to our feet and hands. Determine your needs and choose clothing made of fabric that is suitable for the activity in question.

Hopefully, these suggestions inspire you to get outside and enjoy winter!

_Cited from Winter Fun_  
Ministère de l’Éducation, Loisir et Sport du Québec  
For more informations : [http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca)