

Coping with College Series

Stress, Exercise, and Winter

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Everyone has heard someone say how much better you feel when you exercise. Benefits of exercise include weight loss, sleeping better, and being able to eat more. In return, you will reduce your risk of heart problems and illness. As college students, we are probably equally familiar with reasons we cannot exercise; such as, not having enough time, it's too expensive to join a gym, or it's just boring. However, try to keep this in mind: Research illustrates the virtues of exercise in both physiological and psychological arenas. Exercise also decreases symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression, as well as elevating mood, improving self-esteem, and increasing feelings of well being.

How is this so? Why does exercise make us feel better? Endorphins, our natural opiates, may account for an explanation, in part, for the elevated mood experienced after exercise. Another method that may play a part in feeling better after exercising is being distracted. When focusing on our workout, we often momentarily forget about our stressors.

Now that the cool weather is finally here, you probably feel like hanging up your sneakers and hibernating for the winter. Exercise, too, can help shake those "winter blues". There are lots of ways to maintain your fair-weather workouts indoors. And, with some common sense, there is no reason you can't exercise outdoors year-round.

If you would rather stay out of the cold, try mall walking. It's not just for grandma and grandpa anymore! You will be astounded at how quickly you finish your workout. Another indoor resource is a health club. To learn more about the Recreation Center at ISU, call 438-PLAY. Working out in water is easier on the joints than other forms of exercise, so if you have bad knees, this is right for you! McCormick Hall has open swim hours every day: MTR 8-10pm, W 7-10pm, F 7-9pm, Sat. & Sun. 12-5pm.

Unless advised against it, there is usually no reason you cannot continue your favorite activity outdoors unless the weather is extreme. Another alternative is an outdoor sport such as snow shoeing or cross-country skiing on the Constitution Trail.

If you do decide to brave the weather, dress appropriately! First, Dress in layers. Most heat loss is through the head so be sure to wear a hat. You don't want to sweat a lot and become chilled, so you should start out being a little cool.

Also, wear synthetic fabrics that keep moisture away from your skin. Second, even in cold weather drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. Finally, exercise defensively! Beware of slippery surfaces. Exercise in daylight, if possible, anticipating that drivers may not be able to see you or stop quickly.

If you find that exercising does not decrease your stress levels enough, or if you have any other questions about coping with the stressors of being a student, call Student Counseling Services at 438-3655.