

GET FIT & GET HEALTHY

TOPS: Chilly outdoors can offer fitness fun

During this time of year it's a natural instinct for our bodies to tell us to stay indoors and load up on calories to keep warm and cozy all winter long. But this sort of lifestyle may cause one to pack on the pounds and can lead to a range of health-related concerns.

While some prefer to head to the gym to keep up their fitness routine, Amy Goldwater, M.S., educator, former body-building champion, and physical fitness expert for TOPS Club, Inc. (Take Off Pounds Sensibly), the non-profit weight-loss support organization, recommends a list of creative outdoor activities to enjoy with family and friends.

"Fun activities like snowball fights, making snow angels, and building a snowman count as exercise and burn calories," Goldwater says. "For example, a 150 pound person burns an average of 285 calories per hour building a snowman, 319 calories per hour during that snowball fight, and 214 calories burned per hour making snow angels."

Other winter "fitness" activi-



Traditional outdoor winter activities also are excellent fitness opportunities, according to Goldwater. Ice-skating, hiking in the snow, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing, offer great cardiovascular workouts. Remember to dress warmly and in layers; stay hydrated; keep hands, feet, and head warm with outerwear; and keep an eye on the weather forecast for snow and wind chill warnings.

Eat a light snack an hour or two before working out, to add energy and prevent distracting hunger pangs. Ideal snack options should be low-fat and include fruit smoothies; a few handfuls of nuts; hard-boiled eggs; and fast-digesting, high-glycemic fresh fruit like watermelon, grapes, pineapple, and bananas.

TOPS Club Inc. (Take Off Pounds Sensibly), a nonprofit weight-loss support and wellness education organization with chapters in Acton and Georgetown. For details go to www.tops.org.

ties to consider include:

- Building a snow fort or igloo;
- Playing chase, tag, or hide and seek;
- Having a scavenger hunt for winter nature items, such as animal tracks, pinecones, or bird nests;
- Shoveling a path in the yard like a maze;
- Setting up an obstacle course in the yard with jumps, tunnels, and other challenges;

All of these activities burn significant calories during participation. In fact, an hour of snow shoveling can burn 340 calories.



Skate time

Friends Kyle Holmes and Victoria Vlahor enjoyed finished exams at Acton High School as they spent some time on the outdoor rink at McKenzie-Smith Bennett School recently.

Photo by Ted Brown

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