

Troop497.org Cold Weather Camping Tips

CLOTHING

Dress in layers. You can add or remove layers to regulate your body temperature. You should strive to be warm without moisture accumulating on your base layers. Outdoor clothing is designed to satisfy one of three primary layers:

1. Wear a wicking layer against the skin. This should be tight against the skin so it will wick moisture away from the skin to the next layer. Wool, wool blends, and synthetics work best.
2. Next are your insulation layer(s). These can be wool, fleece, lofting fabrics, and synthetics in a myriad of combinations.
3. Your outer layer is next. This is generally a wind and waterproof shell. In really cold conditions some people prefer just a wind proof layer opting for more breathability to let moisture escape their clothing.

In cold weather, **COTTON KILLS**. It is the worst material you can wear. It has almost no insulation value when it gets wet from sweat, snow, or rain. It also becomes heavy and takes a long time to dry out which generally will not happen on your body. **Wool** is a very versatile winter fabric. It is comfortable over a wide range of temperature, maintains insulation ability even when wet, and base layers can dry out from body heat when you reduce your exertion. There are also synthetic materials that have similar properties and are suitable for cold weather.

Wear heavy wool socks, again, leave the cotton home. Your boots should not be so tight they will restrict blood flow to your feet. Winter boots, larger than your normal shoe size, will allow you to wear thicker socks. If your boots are too tight, try to borrow a larger pair from a sibling, parent, or friend.

If you are going to spend a lot of time outdoors, consider getting insulated **boots**. Also, get some **insulated insoles** for your shoes or boots. **Gaiters** can keep the snow from entering your boots by providing a seal between your pants and your boots. Short gaiters will do the job and keep rocks out of your boot. If you are going to be deep snow then consider waterproof knee high gaiters. These will also keep your pant legs dry.

Wear a warm **hat**, or two, to prevent heat loss through your head. Your body will divert blood from your extremities to protect your head, so as the saying goes, wearing a hat will keep your feet warmer. Wear a mid-layer with a hood, or a balaclava, neck gaiter, or scarf to keep your loss from your neck to a minimum.

Mittens are warmer than gloves and should be worn when you don't need finger dexterity. If you need the use of your fingers then consider wearing a liner glove under your mittens. Use one that has "non slip" added to the outside to better grip cameras and other objects. Always carry a **spare set of mittens**, or one for each day of a weekend camping trip. Some gloves have pockets for chemical hand warmers. These work best if part of the liner glove. Don't place the hand warmers in direct contact with your skin. You may seriously burn your skin.

WHILE ACTIVE

You need less clothing while active and generating heat by hiking, playing games, and doing other strenuous activities. Take off layers while doing these activities. If it is not windy, snowing, or raining you might want to take off your outer layer for more breathability. Otherwise, you should take off some middle layers. Your goal is to not have moisture accumulate in your clothing. Keep the layers you take off nearby so you can put them on when you stop your exertions.

WHILE INACTIVE IN A COLD CAMP OR IN A HEATED SHELTER

Two different approaches for these conditions. If you are in a cold camp you need to add layers to stay warm. You should also periodically move about to generate heat. If you are going to sit, you should do so on an insulating layer. You can purchase foam pads at a camping store specifically for this purpose. They work great on the ground or on a bench. You can also purchase an inexpensive foam insulation sleeping pad and cut it to fit a chair. Cut it long enough to not only sit on, but to also insulate your back. At night, you can put this on the floor of your tent to insulate a place to sit, change clothing, etc.

In a heated shelter you need to remove clothing, so you don't overheat. If you are going to be in and out a lot, keep the shelter cooler so you don't have to remove as much clothing. Use this time to dry out clothing. A pair of "indoor" shoes will give your boots a chance to air out and make it more comfortable. The floor of your shelter will probably be wet so don't plan on walking around in just your socks.

OVERNIGHT IN COLD WEATHER

There are several things you can do to make your overnight experience more comfortable when sleeping outside in the cold.

Get a **sleeping bag** with a comfort rating for the coldest temperature you expect to sleep in. If you are not going to camp in these conditions frequently, you can double up on sleeping bags but make sure you still have plenty of room inside the bag. Borrow a second bag for the infrequent trip. There are also a variety of liners that will increase the warmth of a

sleeping bag. You can also use a space blanket or other options on the outside of the bag but these are harder to keep in place and may reduce the loft of your bag if they add substantial weight.

Always use a **pad** under your sleeping bag. It is the pad that provides warmth when your bag is compressed by your body weight. If your pad has a low R-value, double up on the pad or put a wool blanket underneath your sleeping bag for extra warmth.

Keep your **head and neck** warm while you sleep. The right balaclava will do both; so will a combination of a neck gaiter and a stocking cap. If you cinch your hood on your sleeping bag don't cover your mouth, nose, or eyes. You should not breathe into your bag because you will emit a lot of moisture which will cause your bag to become less efficient. An alternative to all of this is to cover your head with a breathable fleece or other covering and breath through it.

Try to go to bed with warm feet. Wear a thin pair of dry loose-fitting wool socks to bed. Tossing one or two **chemical hand warmers** down by your feet will make a real difference. The socks will keep them from touching your skin and causing burns.

Keep things from **freezing overnight** inside your tent and warm items before putting them on in the morning. Untie your boot laces completely and open up your boots wide before going to bed. This will make it easier to put them on in the morning. Remember to do this again if you must leave the tent in the middle of the night. Otherwise, you are going to have to warm your laces with your hands to untie the frozen knots.

To keep water from freezing, place the bottle between the sleepers on the outside of the sleeping bag and in the interior of the tent. If you are by yourself, you may need to put the bottle inside your bag. Start with warm water. A wide mouth bottle also makes it easier to break ice if needed.

Change into dry clothes for sleeping. On a weekend camping trip change into a fresh base layer at night that you will wear the next day. It is fewer cold pieces of clothing to put on in the morning. Also, put any deodorant on at night; solids work best or liquids that won't freeze.

Don't try to dry your clothing inside your bag or put them there overnight to keep them warm. The damp clothing will add moisture to your bag and it will get colder. You can put your socks between your bag and your pad to keep them warmer.

In the morning start by sitting up in your bag and putting on your upper body clothes including your jacket. Warm the inner layer of your clothes by putting the next one or two pieces in your bag for a few minutes. Then get out of the bag and put on your pants socks

and lower layers. If your bag is roomy enough you may be able to put your socks on in the sleeping bag.

TENTS

A four-season tent will be warmer in the winter. They generally have zipped coverings over the venting in the tent so you can reduce air entry to the tent. Try to avoid using a tent that has large areas of mesh panels.

You can make a three-season tent warmer by collapsing one the vestibules, so the outside nylon layer covers the mesh on that side. Stake it down near the tent side. You can also reduce venting by not pulling out the tent sides near where you sleep. You will need to vent the tent some or moisture will build up and freeze on the inside of your tent. Put your clothes in bags overnight and cover any clothing so frozen moisture on the inside of your tent doesn't fall on your clothing when you accidentally shake the tent while moving around in the morning.

HAVE A TIP YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?

Email webmaster497@gmail.com with your tip to be considered for the next revision of this document.