

COLD WEATHER CAMPING GUIDELINES

The key to cold weather camping is staying dry, warm, and hydrated. If you need to make a fire to keep warm, then you are not dressed correctly. If you are beginning to feel thirsty, then you are not drinking enough water. The following tips will help you to have a safe and fun cold weather camping trip.

- Clothing is one of the keys to staying warm and dry. You need to layer your clothes, and be sure they are not too tight. Loose clothing is more insulating and can keep you warmer. Begin with long, thermal polypropylene underwear. If you do not have this, wool is your next best choice. Never wear cotton clothing when camping in the cold—it is not a good insulator, and if wet, will chill you quickly. Wool, gore-tex and polypropylene clothing will wick moisture away from your body. Avoid jeans, which are cotton and will become easily wet and cold.
- Your choice of coat is important. Be sure it is meant for extreme cold, and is large enough to wear around your layers without being tight. A coat that has a hood will help to keep your body warm, and will keep rain and snow off of your neck.
- Always wear a hat. In extreme cold, you may want to use a ski mask for extra warmth. 90% of your body heat can be lost through your head—keep a warm hat on at all times.
- Wear a scarf to keep the cold air off of your neck. Any skin that is unprotected will make your body lose heat. Keep every part of your body covered.
- Although you will probably need gloves off and on to tend camp, mittens will also help keep your hands warm. Mittens allow fingers to touch each other and gain heat from each other.
- For your feet, start with thinner wicking socks, and finish with wool socks over them. Any boots or shoes you wear should be waterproof. Do not wear tennis shoes, and do not wear tight leather boots either. Your feet need to be able to move—especially your toes. Big rubber overboots are good to place over shoes, with the socks underneath.
- Never kneel down or touch the ground—use a camp stool instead. You do not want moisture from the ground to wet your clothes.
- If you are camping in moist cold, change your clothing several times a day.
- Immediately before you go to sleep, change your clothing. Avoid wearing clothes to bed that you have walked around in at camp, as they likely will have moisture in them and will chill you in your sleeping bag. Always try to go to sleep with dry, fresh, and loose clothing.

- Place your tent on higher ground, away from the colder air. Place a moisture-proof tarp or footprint under the tent. Do not let the tarp go past the tent, because if it rains, this will serve as a funnel for water to go under your tent. Place your tent where the sun will shine on it in the morning.
- Drink drink drink water! Plan on at least 2 gallons per day, if not more. If you even begin to think about being thirsty, then you are on your way to becoming dehydrated, which can lead quickly to hypothermia.
- Eat complex carbs such as starches. Avoid caffeine and high sugar snacks such as chocolate.
- Your sleeping bag should be synthetic and rated for cold weather camping. A mummy bag intended for 0 degree weather is good. You can find mummy sleeping bags that are malleable and easy to carry in a stuff sack. When you are back home, store your sleeping bag outside of the stuff sack so you won't compress the stuffing.
- Never sleep on a cot in cold weather camping. This allows the cold air to touch every side of you. Instead, purchase an insulated mat that will keep you off of the ground and keep you warm. If your sleeping bag does not have head protection, wear your hat at night. Avoid breathing inside of your sleeping bag, which will create moisture and chill you during the night. You may line your bag with a wool blanket for further protection from the cold.
- Before you go to bed, you can place a hand warmer in the bottom of your sleeping bag. You may also wish to place an empty bottle with a very tight seal in the bag with you, just in case nature calls during the night.
- Air out your tent each day to remove any moisture that accumulated during the night.