

Staying fit in the off-season

Be ready for that first hike of the year.

While it seems like common sense to not go on a fifteen mile downhill knee-breaker in early spring after a long, inactive winter, sometimes we just get caught up in the adventure and excitement of being outdoors. By making a few simple adjustments to your normal routine in the off-season, however, you'll find yourself avoiding some of those early-season injuries and aches.

Walk, don't drive. Some of your daily commutes can be turned into training by walking instead of driving your car. Walk to the supermarket with your backpack and fill it up with your groceries for some good backpacking practice. Walk to a nearby park to enjoy your lunch rather than eating in the company break room.

Bike your way to fitness. If you can't make time to walk all over town for errands, consider riding a bike. In many urban areas, bike paths make riding an attractive alternative to sitting in rush hour traffic. Be sure to always wear a helmet and keep an eye out for cars and pedestrians.

Step into fitness. Though staircases are often hidden in large office buildings as part of the fire escape, that doesn't mean you can't use them. Run up and down stairs to keep your heart pumping and improve your leg muscles. Choose to take the stairs instead of the elevator. When you're on a steep incline on the trail, you're legs will thank you for all the practice.

Hike first, pack later. Hiking doesn't necessarily involve wearing a huge bulky backpack. Your first several trips outdoors can be with a small pack carrying only the 10 Essentials. Once your body is ready for longer hikes you can prepare yourself for a weekend getaway.

Mix it up some. In winter months, your favorite hiking trails might be great for snowshoeing or cross country skiing. Indoor jogging and exercise on elliptical machines will keep your heart and lungs in tip-top shape. Yoga and swimming are also great for keeping you limber and avoiding injury.

