

Layering For Cold Weather: Why It's Important

The correct clothing layers and fabrics help keep you dry, which is crucial for staying warm. Being cold and damp puts you at a higher risk of hypothermia, which may be life-threatening.

With our community's activity levels we can always use less cotton to help better regulate our body temps, but this is especially crucial once the sun's rays become less direct in the fall, the temps drop below 60, and the winter winds begin to blow. So please read on with special attention to your fabric choices! ALWAYS follow the cleaning and care instructions on your garments, usually washed in cold temps without softeners and dried in very low temps/tumbled. Don't forget our outer layers should be cleaned when dirty as well. This will insure all our layers perform season after season.

Dressing in layers prepares you for any situation, as winter weather can be unpredictable. First, check your local weather report daily, then wear clothing that will insulate you for your comfort level, bring extras and always be prepared. Whether it's 60 degrees F or -10 degrees F, layers can be a lifesaver.

How to Layer For Cold Weather

There are two important things to know when layering for cold weather:

1. **Layers should be snug - but not tight - to allow air to circulate:** A common misconception about dressing in layers is that the layers should be tight. However, having a thin layer of air between your skin and clothing helps insulate you against the cold. Allowing that air to circulate between your layers is one of the most effective ways to stay warm.
2. **Layers should be added or removed to maintain a comfortable body temperature:** One of the biggest challenges in wearing clothes for cold weather is staying comfortable indoors and outdoors. Layering allows you to add or remove clothing as necessary to maintain a "just right" body temperature.

Cold Weather Layering Guide: *Rule of 3*

There are three layers you can/should wear to keep you warm in cold weather

1. BASE LAYER (MOST IMPORTANT) - *KEEPS SKIN DRY*

The best base layer will be moisture wicking, and should be worn neck to ankle to wrist (*We will discuss our hands, neck/head, and feet below*). As the temps continue to drop increasing the weight of this base layer is where you can get the best insulation and comfort to continue enjoying the outdoors (*Usually base layers are sold as lightweight, midweight and heavyweight*).

The base layer will create a thin pocket of insulating air, move sweat away from your skin to keep it dry, and be a critical layer of defense for your skin.

2. MIDDLE LAYER - GIVES YOU EXTRA INSULATION/WARMTH

The middle clothing layer will trap a thicker pocket of air, insulating you further. The thicker the middle layer is, the warmer you'll be. Often times middle layers are not required for your lower bodies, especially when outdoors in high physical output situations.

Mid-layer garments are available in a wide range of options, both synthetic and natural. Polyester and Merino wool sweaters, sweatshirts, flannel and fleece are all popular choices. Lightweight down also makes a great middle layer but is less effective if it gets wet.

3. OUTER LAYER - THAT PROTECTS YOU

The outer layer is a jacket and pants/bibs that shield you from wind, rain and snow, keeping your inner layers dry from the outside. A good outer layer also allows enough ventilation of your body heat through the fabric to keep your base layer dry on the inside. Unfortunately, many people skip the first or second layers and jump straight to the outer layer, which is not the best defense against bone-chilling weather.

When selecting an outer layer, remember that it will be covering two other layers. Therefore, make sure it's large enough to fit over other garments without being too tight.

TYPES OF OUTER LAYERS:

Waterproof, Water-resistant, Insulated vs. Non-insulated

Waterproof protects against heavy rain and snow. Waterproof garments are also "windproof," which is something to keep in mind if cold, heavy winds are also an issue. Waterproof garments always cost more, but the investment may be worth it if you regularly endure severe weather conditions. Waterproof garment can be found insulated or non-insulated. (e.g. Gore-Tex)

Water-resistant jackets have a water-repellent exterior finish that repels moisture and keeps you dry in light rain or snow. Water-resistant garments are good for wind protection but will not breathe as well as a good waterproof garment. Often times water-resistant garments will be insulated. Most common winter/ski pants and jackets are water-resistant and insulated.

Insulated vs Non-insulated, as mentioned above most winter garments are insulated to some amount, especially children's sizes. Some jackets will give you the layering option of removing the insulated portion from the weather proofed outer shell, which is a nice option to have. Even better options in an outer layer are vents that can be opened or closed in high heat areas like the arm pits and the inside or outside of our thighs.

HEAD, HANDS, FEET, EYES & SKIN

Last but certainly not least important! It is important to consider layering on your head and hands, but be very careful when considering to do so with your feet.

The **HEAD** can dissipate a lot of heat. Therefore, it is just as important to consider a moisture wicking layer here too. If you run very hot perhaps a simple neck tube over your neck, jaw and ears will be good, especially if wearing a helmet with good ventilation. When not wearing a helmet these neck tubes can be worn to cover the tops of your heads from the wind. In colder temps a moisture wicking balaclava with a hinged jaw piece will often be the most comfortable option. Knitted winter hats are good for low physical output while outdoors, but a base layer below it is still advisable.

HANDS are often one of the hardest things we learn to regulate while playing outside in the cold, especially when there is wet snow! Almost nothing can defeat wet snow, so it is always a good idea to have a spare pair of water-resistant gloves.

To control the sweat of our hands and prevent soaking your gloves from the inside, it can be highly beneficial to have several moisture wicking glove liners that can easily be swapped when needed and cleaned after each use.

While we do not clean our gloves often, if at all (depending on material), it is always important to air them out after each use so they dry. PRO TIP: air circulation while airing out equipment is more important than heat, in fact no heat is required beyond ensuring the wet gear doesn't freeze before the air can dry it. Bonus factor is stinky bacteria does not grow as well in dry places that have good air circulation!

FEET should be protected by wearing one pair of synthetic or wool blend winter socks. These fabrics will be moisture wicking and allow the chosen boot to provide any further insulation and waterproofing to keep our feet cozy and dry. When skiing or snowboarding consider sport-specific socks, these will have added cushioning for your shins, which is a critical area of constant pressure for enjoying those activities.

All of these base layers can be found in multiple fabric types, and multiple thicknesses/weight

Please never forget to stress the importance of sunblock on any exposed skin, and eye protection (Sun glasses or goggles) both from sun rays, snow glare and physical elements.