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Winter Family Fitness

by Ann Douglas

Looking for an excuse to head outdoors with your kids? Here's a statistic that's pretty much guaranteed to get you and your kids off the couch. A mother's participation in physical activity increases the likelihood that her child will be physically active by 22% while a father's participation in physical activity can increase the likelihood that his child will be physically active by 11%.

Once you've made up your mind to do something to encourage your kids to be more active this winter, you simply need to block off some time in your family's schedule each week for family fitness. Here are some fun ways to get—and stay—active as a family this winter.

Hit the Slopes. (The toboggan slopes, that is.) Remember how much fun you had going tobogganing as a kid? Well, last time I checked, there was no law saying you had to bow out of all that fun, just because you're old enough to pay taxes. So grab your scarf, slip into a pair of snow pants, and hitch a ride on your kid's toboggan. (If that doesn't leave you feeling a good decade or two younger, I don't know what will!)

Give Frosty—and Yourself—a Workout. Spend an afternoon making snowmen, snowwomen, snowchildren, snowpets—well, you get the picture. All that snow-rolling is surprisingly good exercise, as are the snow angels (think jumping jacks!) that your kids will no-doubt be inspired to make while they're frolicking around in the snow.

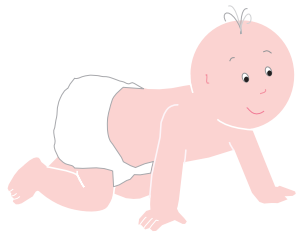
Make Tracks. There's no easier time to spot animal tracks than when the ground is covered in a blanket snow, so bundle up your kids for a winter hike and head to the nearest park or conservation area to see what types of animal tracks you can discover. Or, if that seems like too much work, you can scout your own neighborhood for signs of squirrels, rabbits, dogs, cats, and other animals on the move, and have fun making your own tracks at the same time.

Build a Backyard Skating Rink. This requires a steady commitment from the grown-ups in the household (to say nothing of the art and science of ice making), but the rewards can be incredible. A backyard skating rink can encourage both grown-ups and kids alike to lace up and hit the ice for a game of pick-up hockey. Hint: You can get the lowdown on rink building by reading the "Backyard Ice Rink Building" section at <http://www.rinkrake.com/Info/building.php>.

Play Frisbee. Who says you can only play Frisbee on a sizzling hot summer day? Frisbee is a lot more fun—and a lot more challenging—when played on a cold winter day. After all, there's always the chance you're going to lose your Frisbee in a snowdrift. (A word to the wise: white is not the color of choice for a winter game of Frisbee!)

Play Soccer in the Snow. The uneven terrain makes it extra challenging to chase the ball down the field. Kids of all ages will get a kick out of trying their hand at a game of "snoccer," so plan to host a mid-winter tournament on your street. (You can invite everyone back to your house afterwards to warm up over a steamy cup of hot chocolate.)

Know When to Stay Indoors. There will be times this winter when no one wants to venture outdoors because the weather is simply too miserable to make it any fun. In that case, you'll want to have some indoor fitness activities lined up. You'll no doubt find that you score big points with your kids if you set up an indoor play area at home where they are allowed to break the standard "no rough-housing in the house rule." Remove lamps and other breakable objects and let your kids know that—in this one part of the house at least—rolling, climbing, jumping, and tumbling aren't just allowed: they're actually encouraged! And, of course, there are plenty of great indoor fitness activities that can be enjoyed in the community year-round: everything from bowling to swimming to roller-skating.



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Note: You can find other tips on encouraging kids to be physically active in my book *The Mother of All Parenting Books*.