

Cold-Weather Camping Tips

Food and Water

- Pack your water bottle deep inside your backpack so it will not freeze. Make sure the lid is screwed on tight and pack it upside-down. Water freezes from the top, so if it is stored upside-down, the mouth of the bottle remains free of ice. Water bottle insulators also help to keep water from freezing. If possible, fill your bottles with hot water.
- Eat often and carry plenty of food. You can burn up to 8,000 calories per day when winter camping.
- Drink plenty of hot soup and beverages during your winter camping trip. You need to replace water lost both through physical exertion and also from the dry, cold air drawing moisture from your face and skin. Try instant cocoa, decaffeinated coffee or tea, fruit-flavored drinks and instant breakfast drinks. Caffeinated drinks are not recommended. They contain diuretics that cause you to lose fluids.
- As you gain altitude, food takes longer to cook. Plan meals that do not require a lot of boiling.
- Consider taking an extra stove and plenty of stove fuel, up to one-half cup per person per day. It takes a lot of fuel to melt snow for drinking water.

Tents and Sleeping Bags

- If you have room to carry them, take two sleeping bag pads, a self-inflating one and a lightweight closed-cell foam pad, for additional insulation when camping in cold climates.
- Before you get into your sleeping bag at night, fill your water bottle with hot water for use as a hot-water bottle.
- Take a metal tube that is a bit wider than your tent pole with you. If a tent pole breaks, slide the tube over the broken area to act as a splint and secure the tube to the poles with duct tape. Store your duct tape around your ski pole or water bottle.

Staying Warm

- If you stop to take a water or snack break, store the outer shell of your mittens or gloves in your pack or attach them to your jacket with a clip. Sticking them under your arm makes it easier to have them blow away with a gust of wind. If you lose a mitten, use a spare sock as a substitute.

Safety

- Winter is not the time to go solo; always camp with others. Leave your itinerary with a friend or family member and check in with them on your return.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia among your camping group: uncontrolled shivering, poor motor coordination, mental confusion and mumbling. If someone exhibits these symptoms, get them into dry clothes or a sleeping bag. Have them huddle close to a warm, dry person and give them a warm beverage.
- Check for signs of frostbite and pay attention to cold feet. Protected skin, as well as exposed skin, are all susceptible to freezing and toes are the most vulnerable. The first sign of frostbite is white patches on the skin surface. If the skin does not return to its normal color after applying gentle pressure, you should seek medical attention as soon as possible.
- Pack a colorful bandana in your pack. In the rare event you need to signal rescue workers, you can attach the bandana to your ski pole and use it as a flag.

Skills

- If you are backcountry skiing in hilly terrain, climbing skins help you ascend hills with less effort. Skins are slightly narrower than the width of a ski. They attach to a ski by straps or an adhesive backing. The skins have synthetic hairs or scales that flow from front to back so they grip snow and keep you from sliding backwards on hills.