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Winter joints

If your knees can tell you when a winter storm is coming, you are not alone. Many people who experience arthritis or inflammation in the joints find that the cold temperature may exacerbate the discomfort. So how can you keep up your exercise routine when your joints want to keep you on the couch?

"The colder, winter months add stress to the bones, joints, ligaments and tendons," says Matthew Wert, M.D., chief of sports medicine at NewYork-Presbyterian Brooklyn Methodist Hospital (NYPBMH). "Care must be taken to ensure that enough time is dedicated to warming up before outdoor exercise. If people go from 0 to 60 without warming up in the wintertime, they run the risk of strained muscles, sprained ligaments and sore joints. Dedicate about 10 to 15 minutes before you begin your exercise in earnest to get your heart pumping, and your blood flowing through your muscles. A good warm up also activates the fluids that lubricate the joints to flow. Stiffness and

risk of injury will decrease and mobility will increase."

Winter might also be a good time to try indoor exercise options. Many gyms have programs that can get the heart rate up and joint stress down. "Equipment such as the elliptical machine or an upright or recumbent bicycle offers great, low-impact exercise options for people with joint pain," says Dr. Wert. "If the gym facility has a pool, swimming is a perfect low-impact sport." He adds that if a person insists on exercising outside or doesn't have access to a gym, he or she should keep it simple. "Winter sports call on muscles that are rarely used during the summer months—and unless those muscles are already developed and in great condition, taking them out of retirement for a downhill skiing weekend can be a recipe for disaster." Consider cross-country skiing, or snowshoeing instead. Or even a just a nice walk, he adds.

If you injure yourself while exercising outdoors in low temperatures, move indoors as soon as possible. Your core temperature can quickly drop, especially as any sweat cools and freezes. Assess the injury—if it is muscular in nature, rest and taking ibuprofen, or another over the counter anti-inflammatory drug (aspirin or naproxen), should start the

healing process. However, if a broken bone or a more severe injury is suspected, get help right away. And listen to your body—even if you don't injure yourself but your joints are painful, talk to an orthopedist or a specialist in sports medicine about additional exercise

options. Joint pain and winter exercise do not need to be mutually exclusive. *To find a doctor with NYPB-MH's Sports Medicine Program, call 718 499-CARE or use the Find A Doctor tool at www.nyp.org/brooklyn. —New York Methodist Hospital*



Matthew Wert, M.D., director of sports medicine at NewYork-Presbyterian Brooklyn Methodist Hospital, checks a patient's knee.