

## TIPS FOR GETTING INTO SNOWSHOEING

Snowshoeing is a great out door winter activity to get some exercise, see nature in winter and socialize with friends and colleagues who share a common interest.

You are taking up an activity that has been part of Canadian culture for hundreds of years dating way back to the aboriginal people, first explorers and fur trappers.

Medical practitioners, fitness coaches and athletic therapists all agree that regular outdoor activity particularly during the winter can help with cardiovascular health, muscular strength and mental wellness.

The activity is quite aerobic so depending on how hard you want to walk or run it is a really great work out with very little ramp up time to acquire the skill. Unlike skiing, snowshoeing requires very little physical aptitude. It is pretty easy to learn.

If you are a regular competing endurance athlete and would like an alternative winter activity to augment your training this is an ideal option.

If you are looking

1. If you decide you want to give this a go and you have not engaged in any aerobic exercise the first thing you should do is visit your doctor for a physical and a fitness test to make sure you are strong enough to withstand the rigors of this activity.
2. Start with some moderate walking or light jogging for few minutes on trails convenient to home or work and see how that feels. In the beginning weeks it is good to take it easy and build up slowly. Injury can occur with too much too soon. Don't forget to take few minutes to stretch before and after.
3. Buying snowshoes is pretty easy to do and there are plenty of stores that have lots of inventory available at a variety of prices. Check around online to narrow down the choices then visit a store near you to try them on and get a good feel for how they would perform on the trail.
4. Snowshoes come in a variety of sizes, shapes, colours and prices so choose the one(s) that are best for you. Generally the larger snowshoes are for walking in deep snow, suitable for larger people and or carrying heavy gear. The smaller ones are for packed trails, smaller athletes and racing. Prices range from under \$100 to over \$300 depending on quality, construction and longevity.
5. The shoes that you use for this activity should be suitable for winter. Warm enough to withstand the cold and of sufficient quality to keep the snow out. Many of the stores carry winter hiking boots and winter running shoes built for being on snowy trails. Many of the shoes have built grooves across the back of the heel to aid in securing the binding strap. High top shoes or boots also help keep the snow from entering your foot which can be annoying.

6. Clothing for snowshoeing is generally made of breathable fabric, light weight and available in a variety of prices. Snowshoeing is an aerobic activity that will quickly raise the heart rate and make you sweat under your gear so it best to not over dress. A heavy parka or ski jacket will soon feel very hot after a few minutes so it is best to wear layers of clothing. In the first few minutes you should feel a little on the cold side until you get heated up.
7. Your first time out with the new gear should be a test just to get the hang of it and see if everything meets your expectations. Getting the snowshoes on and off is bit tricky at first. It takes some fiddling with the straps and the binding to get your foot in strapped down. Get some instructions from the store. Practicing at home would be advisable.
8. The actual technique of snowshoeing basically identical to walking or running with a few wrinkles added in. You will have to get used to moving forward with a little bit wider stride to avoid clipping the inside of the snowshoes and falling.
9. The snowshoe tend to drag a bit when you walk or run so you have to allow for that as you get accustom to the activity.
10. Going up and down hills tends to be a little different than regular walking or running. The cleats on the bottom of the snowshoe are design to give you traction in the snow but they are limited in terms of helping you ascend or descend a grade so will you have to experiment to find the ideal balance.
11. Tripping is major hazard in the sport that can lead to injury. Getting your snowshoes tangled up with each other, slipping on a grade or stumbling over a hidden tree root can cause you to take quite a tumble. All this you will learn over time so it best to take it slow at first and build your experience and skill level.
12. Finding places to snowshoe is quite easy and is becoming even easier as the sport grows and there are more and more venues coming on line. Google snowshoeing in your area and you should find a number of choices pop up. Municipal, provincial and federal parks all have trails and most are open for the winter. Cross country and downhill centers have been adding snowshoe trails for years as way to increase visitor traffic so a quick google search will give you a list of the ones in your area. In addition we will be adding a list of venues approved by Snowshoe Canada as we go forward. Check back soon for updates.