

How to Buy Clothes for Cold-Weather Activities

Many people invite disaster when selecting winter clothes: Not wearing a hat is the number one mistake. If you use fashion as your guide instead of function, rest assured you'll be miserable when that first icy blast hits.

Instructions

- **STEP 1:** Conduct research if possible. If you've just arrived in a resort town, check out what the locals are wearing. In bad weather, they'll be dressed more like mountaineers than fashion models.
- **STEP 2:** Layer clothing for maximum warmth and convenience. Layers allow you to add and remove items as your body temperature rises and falls. Begin with a base layer of polypropylene underwear, top and bottom. You can purchase these inexpensively at many outdoor stores. Brand-name items don't always deliver better quality, despite their higher costs.
- **STEP 3:** Add one or more fleece layers as dictated by your comfort range. Again, these needn't be expensive to provide effective warmth. A vest is a good option, paired with a long-sleeved layer.
- **STEP 4:** Add an outer waterproof, breathable shell. This layer does not need heavy insulation unless you expect to encounter below-zero temperatures. For jackets, get something that extends below your waist and has a hood. Pants should be loose fitting and should rise above your waist to keep out snow. Look for sealed seams and elastic or drawstrings at cuffs and hems.
- **STEP 5:** If you need an insulated top layer, decide on either synthetic or goose-down filling. Synthetic filling will perform better if it gets wet, while down loses its warmth when wet. If weight is your primary consideration, however, buy goose down. It is warmer for its weight than any synthetic insulator.
- **STEP 6:** Inspect the seams of insulated clothing. High-quality items have baffled seams. This means the stitching on the outside and inside layers doesn't meet, creating cold spots. Clothes without baffled seams are sewn straight through the two layers, and allow cold air to enter.
- **STEP 7:** Wear a hat that completely covers your head, or even one that has earflaps, to prevent a potentially life-endangering loss of body heat. Look for itch-free fleece headbands on warm wool hats.
- **STEP 8:** Waterproof, gauntlet-type gloves that extend over your jacket's sleeves provide the most protection from snow and water. Some people's fingers stay warmer in mittens.
- **STEP 9:** Boots present the biggest challenge for the novice winter recreationist. The most successful boot design incorporates a rubber lower boot with a leather top and removable felt liner. Boot temperature ratings are particularly important if you will be outside for long periods of time and need your feet to stay warm.

MATERIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Cotton Avoid cotton, because once it gets wet, it stays wet and heavy. Snow

country survival experts have a saying: Cotton kills.

Goose Down	Lightweight down is a great insulator for extreme cold, but can be too warm for active sports, and loses its ability to insulate when wet. Not all down provides the same warmth: the higher the fill power, the warmer it is. (Fill power is the volume filled by 1 oz. (31.1 g) of down, and is the standard measure of down quality and performance.) Look for a rating on the tag--650 fill power is good quality, 850 fill power is top quality. Items that don't specify the fill power are generally lower quality.
Synthetic Insulation	Clothing with high-quality synthetic insulation usually lists the brand name. Hollowfill and Thinsulate are the most popular types. They are slightly heavier than down, but stand up to wetness better and dry quickly.
Gore-Tex	The first truly breathable waterproof fabric, Gore-Tex (gore-tex.com) remains the best and is unbeatable for strenuous activity in wet weather. This is an outer shell layer, not an insulator. Expect to pay more for Gore-Tex clothing, which features sealed seams, watertight pockets and covered zippers.
DuPont Cordura	This is a brand name for a tough nylon fabric used to reinforce clothing. Durable gear frequently includes Cordura (cordura.com) patches on heavywear areas like knees, cuffs and seat.

What To Look For

- Layers
- Materials
- Baffled seams
- Waterproof gloves
- Winter boots

Overall Tips & Warnings

- Many outdoor clothing retailers sell both online and through catalogs. REI.com has a tremendous variety of merchandise. SierraTradingPost.com offers cut-rate deals on overstocks from many name-brand manufacturers.
- Check Schnees.com and Sorel.com for good boots. Be sure to select a pair designed for your anticipated needs, paying particular attention to temperature ratings.
- Remember that with outer layers, more money usually does buy better quality.
- Be careful of drying your clothes too close to the fire or other heat source. Synthetic fabrics and insulators may not be able to withstand high temperatures.