

STAYING FIT AND FOCUSED INTO THE NEW YEAR

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Who would've thought that it would take a global pandemic to make people realize that outdoor activities are a great way to use time, get in shape, feel better emotionally and connect with your family? One of the silver linings surrounding the COVID cloud is the awareness that electronics, television and indoor activities can only interest kids and patience-worn parents for so long. With gyms closed and sports activities canceled, suddenly there was a toilet-paper style rush on outdoor goods: canoes, fishing poles, guns, camping gear, ATVs and bikes. Recreation destination towns -- like those in the White Mountains -- were inundated with visitors months before the normal summer season and campgrounds filled with quarantiners and vacationers alike. People got outside, felt the rush that comes from using their own muscles to accomplish something and the freedom that being outdoors brings. How do you keep that enthusiasm and drive to stay fit alive in the dark winter months?

This year, a mild winter has allowed us to stay active and outdoors much longer than normal and, if you dress well and use common sense, there is no reason that you can't continue to be outdoors biking, hiking, kayaking or camping. Dress in layers, be prepared for the unexpected and use caution when adventuring away from the beaten path. There are, of course, winter sports to keep us busy when there is snow: skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Taking advantage of seasonal sports is a great way to keep your outdoor adventures fresh and interesting.

What happens though when winter comes in with a fury and snows, muddy trails, early evenings, windy days and bitter temperatures keep us inside? How do you avoid the winter slump and loss of fitness/weight gain? For cyclists, one answer is an indoor trainer and, for runners and hikers, a treadmill can provide a great workout. Indoor trainers and treadmills allow you to keep on exercising through blizzards and cold nights. Indoor trainers allow you to stay fit and, in most cases, allow you to increase your fitness so that when the snow melts, the mud dries and the days lengthen, you can hit the trails with even more energy and confidence.

One thing that helps me focus is to make plans for spring events (barring future COVID cancellations). Having a goal to focus on gives me the drive to keep on working out even as my brain tells me to curl up in a chair and eat cookies! There are multiple race venues to choose from and, with a little research, you will find one that fits your personality and race style. Mountain bike events can vary from all-out speed courses to technical courses to endurance events so find one that fits your style, sign up and focus on preparing. Even making plans for periodic trips to warmer areas to hike or bike can be a good motivation to stay fit in preparation for these trips.

Another thing that helps me focus on staying active is using an App like Strava to track my activities. Having a place to record what you have accomplished for the day -- and seeing what others have done -- is very motivating for a lot of people. Making daily or weekly goals and participating in different challenges helps keep you on track and moving forward.

Social media groups specializing in what you are interested in can help too. There are groups for the type of bike you ride, the age/gender you are or just general interest groups. I belong to a group for Stache riders, a group for Mountain biking women and a group for Mountain bike fitness. These groups include people worldwide with similar interests and help provide feedback and motivation.

This winter, stay active and know that spring is coming -- both literally and figuratively -- and the upcoming year will be a better one so be prepared both physically and emotionally.