

Long distances are good for the brain

These recent two weeks of our typical "February thaw" have made for more challenging skiing, but have allowed runners, walkers and hikers to return to some of their favorite workouts again.



Outdoors

By John T. Unger

Here in this end of the Uncompahgre Valley, this phase of mud season is nearly over, although our neighboring communities upstream in this valley are still in deep mud for any

travel by foot off of the paved roads and paths.

Now the vanished snow cover has allowed the last late falling leaves to have been raked up.

Since about 80 percent of the Rocky Mountains' snowpack moisture falls during the months of March and April, we look forward to the next storms and hope for that snowfall.

Irrigation canals, reservoir refilling, river trips and the agricultural bounty of the region all depend upon our snowpack increasing in these next two months.

Until that snowfall comes again, however, outdoor adventures via hiking boots, running shoes and bike pedals are now possible for the first time in many weeks. With no ice to slip upon, these sports are beckoning.

Stress reduction, weight loss, strength gains and just plain fun are some of the most common reasons people choose regular outdoor workouts. Brain and memory health may be added to this admirable list of benefits, based on many research studies that are frequently being published in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

Regarding the growth of new cells in an important memory center of the brain, certain types of exercise workouts appear to be better than others. Last month an animal study published in the respected Journal of Physiology showed results that suggest this, and it may influence how we each choose to spend our exercise time.

The effects of three types of exercise workouts were compared. The first type was resistance training or weight lifting. This primarily builds muscle strength and coordination.

Use of free weights or machine-based resistance sessions at a gym fit into this category.



Columnist John Unger removes climbing skins from his skis after an aerobic ascent to timberline in the Northern San Juan Mountains. (Courtesy photo)

when a track athlete builds toward a quarter mile (or 440 meter) running event. Speed is the primary goal in this workout.

For instance, on a local high school track you may see a runner alternating sprinting a lap with jogging a lap, to develop speed by doing these intervals.

The third of the three types of exercise workouts studied was distance running, commonly involving steadier, longer duration oxygen use in an aerobic manner. Endurance and secondarily speed are the goals here. In our region, this workout may take the form of moving up a snowy mountain trail with climbing skins attached to skis, or a long steady cross-country ski outing from the Black Canyon National Park Visitors Center out to High Point and back.

Results of this study showed that the creation of new brain cells occurred far more in the distance runner subjects than in those doing the high-intensity interval training. The weight training subjects showed no growth of new brain cells in the memory center that was studied.

Weight training is suspected, however, to improve links between brain regions, and definitely improves coordination and muscle activity patterns.

All three of these types of workouts showed the usual benefits of activity over sedentary behaviors. It is also important to note that there are distance runners who want to be both fast and strong in, for instance, the 17-mile Imogene Pass Run from Ouray to Telluride.

They therefore not only run distances in their training, but they also include weight training and interval training.

During this warm, dry weather in our area we can promote these brain benefits by an hour jogging on the trails of the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area. For those whose legs prefer pedaling, the Buzzard Gulch or Baldrige Park mountain bike trails are easy to access and great fun. Then when good snow returns in the next week or two, the Black Canyon National Park or the Dave Wood Road cross-country ski trails are so close and such great reminders of why we choose to live here.

John T. Unger is a Diplomate of the American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians, with over twenty-five years of practice in Montrose. Four seasons of self-propelled long distance outings are precious in his view. Ideas for future columns are welcomed at sportsdocung-er.com.

IF YOU GO

The Gunnison Gorge NCA can be reached by driving 10 miles north of Montrose on U.S. 50, then turning right or east on Falcon Road and following it into the NCA.

Buzzard Gulch trails are southwest of Montrose. Take Main Street west to the three-way stop, then left onto Highway 90 as it goes south and on west at the "T." Left or south onto Dave Wood Road/62.50 Road will take you about six miles to these signed trails, on the west side of the road.

Another six miles farther south is the Forest Service boundary and the sign for the Dave Wood Road ski trails, again on the west side of the road.

The Black Canyon National Park turn-off is well-marked, 12 miles east of Montrose.

The second type of exercise workout studied was high-intensity interval training, which entails short, frequent bursts of speed training, as

The wind-chill factor is a factor in frost bite

If there is an element of nature that has caused me more problems over the years, it is the wind. From dust storms, hurricanes, tornados, fighting wildfires and rough water on the oceans, I have learned that the wind is no friend of mine. For us outdoor enthusiasts, in the cold winter months it is even less of a friend.

Wind chill is simply the temperature it feels like outdoors, rather than the actual temperature. As the wind increases, so does heat loss on exposed skin. The wind causes a faster evaporation of moisture and quicker cooling, resulting in a loss of body heat. Wind chill does not impact objects not alive, such as vehicle radiators or exposed pipes.

A 20 mph wind when the temperature is at zero makes a wind chill of minus 22. The other problem with this is that it accelerates frostbite and hypothermia. At that wind chill,

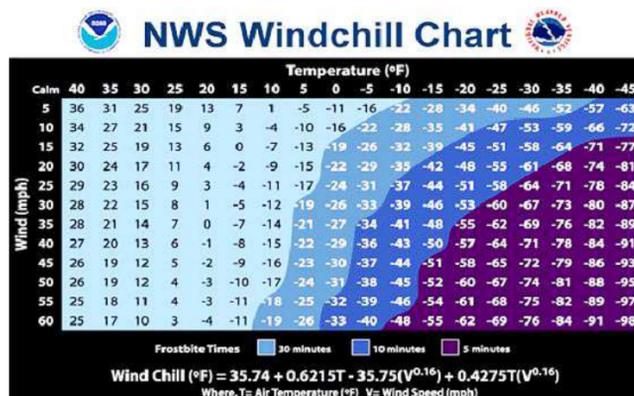
frostbite can occur in as little as 30 minutes.

The secret to prevention is to cover up, leaving little or no exposed skin. The way to do this is to choose your clothing carefully. Many outdoor coats and clothing offer "wind stopper" characteristics. These are specially made synthetics that block wind from penetrating the fabric.

I like to start with a good base layer. There are many quality long underwear type products available. These come in various levels of protection and I usually opt for more than I think I may need.

Avoid the ones made of cotton, as they do not wick away moisture from your skin. Moisture against your skin will make you cold faster as it evaporates.

Look for winter jackets that offer storm flaps over the zippers. A zipper can allow in a great deal of cold air. Drawstrings around the waist



and sleeves, or a stand up collar, will all help keep the wind out. A coat that provides a hood to pull up over your head is a great feature.

Knit hats, scarves and knit gloves may be comfortable, but they have no place with serious outdoor activities. Go for the materials designed to keep the wind out and have good insulation qualities. Products with Thinsulate, Primaloft and Gore-Tex are all good products.

One of my favorite wind fighters is a balaclava. I wear one of these and pull a hood with drawstrings over it to

protect as much of my face as possible. Most of them also do a fair job of protecting your neck also.

There is nothing worse than walking outside and catching a gust of cold wind to your face, causing your eyes to immediately tear up. These tears actually cause your eye to dry out faster. Burning and irritation to the eyes are next as the wind dries out the sensitive areas of them.

To help prevent this, try wearing goggles or wrap around type glasses to help keep the wind out. Using lubricating eye drops or

artificial tears throughout the day will help. Contact lens wearers should be especially careful to rewet their lenses often.

Extended exposure to cold winds also causes skin problems such as dry skin and chapping. Your lips can be especially susceptible to this. Using a good skin lotion helps the skin, both before you go out and when you return home. A lip balm applied to the lips repeatedly throughout the day will help keep the moisture from evaporating from them.

Just like all the problems we may face outdoors, having the right mindset and clothing can protect against wind chill. Remember that wind can come up while you are out there, and without any warning, so preparing for the wind "just in case" is always a good idea.

Stay safe, warm and prepared and until next time, see you on the trail.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.



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By Mark Rackay

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