



Staying Warm when it is Not!
Cold Weather Camping Tips, Tricks & Hints
BSA Troop 843 Lewis Center, Ohio



Rules (staying warm is as easy as 1-2-3-4):

One:

Layers, layers, layers! Bring lots of them and make sure that you have at least one that can be worn as an outer, waterproof/windproof shell to keep everything else DRY. Peel them off as you get warmer during the day – whatever you do, avoid getting sweaty – this will make you wet. Put them back on when you cool down. Your bottom layer should be made of material that wicks moisture away from your skin. Modern active wear made from synthetic materials works best for this. Most of the long underwear you find at a sporting goods store these days is this type of material, “Under-Armor” is a good example, but there are many good choices that are sometimes less pricey. Remember that in regards to your bottom layer “Cotton is the Enemy” it retains moisture close to your skin.

Two:

Stay DRY! If your inner layers get wet, you will be cold. Bring extra clothes that you can put on when you get wet (even if you don’t plan to use them). This also extends to your gear – if it starts raining, sleeting, or snowing – cover your gear with a waterproof layer or put it in your tent, the trailer, car, shelter, etc. When there is wet weather - stay OUT of your tent as much as possible. When we go in there unnecessarily we take a lot of ice/water with us into our tent and everything gets wet. If it’s wet it will be cold!!! When you pack your extra clothes in your backpack, put them in a plastic bag to help keep them dry. **MANAGE SNOW:** snow is like sand on the beach – it will get everywhere – in your tent, boots, sleeves, gloves, etc. If you let it stay there, it will melt and that means WET...

Three:

Wear separate clothes (including socks) for BED! If you are wet (damp), you can still be cold as a Popsicle in your 0 degree sleeping bag. All people perspire during the day (especially your feet). Defend against that moisture by putting on clothes that you brought just for sleeping at bedtime and, even though it’s the last thing you want to do on a COLD morning, take them OFF as soon as you wake up and spread them out to dry until the following night. Alternatively, put on tomorrow’s clothes at bedtime so you don’t have to change again in the morning. If you don’t have DRY clothes to wear to bed (especially socks) you can’t ever get warm and the night is long and miserable.

Four:

Eat and Drink!!! Your clothing and sleeping bag do not generate heat. They simply trap the heat that is generated by your body. If you really want to stay warm, you have to stoke the furnace, which is YOU. So plan on having LOTS to eat. Also plan on drinking LOTS of water.

Other good tricks:

1. Consider bringing a stocking cap to wear to bed (you lose most of your body heat through your head). The one you wear for bed should be separate from the one you wear during the day (just like the rest of your clothes).
2. Wear wool (or synthetic) socks. They are drier than cotton because they can wick the moisture away.
3. If you don’t wear tomorrow’s clothes to bed, put them in the sleeping bag next to you and sleep with them – they’ll be pre-heated by the next morning when you want to put them on.
4. Use two sleeping bags, one inside the other, on extra cold nights – you can turn two 20 degree bags into one -20 degree bag this way!
5. Use a “waffle” mattress under your bag instead of a self-inflating mattress or blow-up mattress. The foam has tiny air pockets instead of one big one and therefore has greater insulating properties to keep your body heat in your sleeping bag (and therefore in you) instead of the heat sinking into the winter landscape beneath your tent. In the early days of scouting, boys were taught to put more padding/blankets underneath themselves, than on top of themselves – this was to build a barrier to prevent body heat from sinking into the cold, frozen earth underneath.
6. About an hour before you want to go to bed – go to your tent and put about 3 or 4 hand or foot warmers in your sleeping bag. Zip it back up and go sit by the fire for an hour. When you go to bed, your bag will be cozy warm and inviting to crawl into!
7. Bring your water to bed. That way it won’t freeze. Just remember to make sure the container is sealed and put that container in a second sealed, waterproof container (like a big zip lock bag). If it leaks: you, your sleeping bag, and your clothes will be wet. Remember WET = COLD. You can also heat the water before bed and use the water bottle as a foot-warmer. Better yet, if you have a thermos bottle with you, put hot water in it before bed and you’ll have something warm to drink when you wake up!

There are great sections in your Handbook and in the Fieldbook on cold weather preparedness; I would suggest reading those as well. With a little advanced planning, even a winter campout in temperatures below freezing can be both fun and surprisingly WARM!

Be prepared, Dr. K