

Dress for Success – Stay Warm in the Cold

Now that the cooler months are upon us, it's time to open up the hope chest and pull out all those wool sweaters, toboggan hats, neoprene booties, scarves, mittens, wicking base layers, down parkas, long sleeved jerseys, fake fur lined collars, lobster gloves, balaclavas, fleece lined tights, and riding jackets. Well...you'll really only need about half that stuff to stay warm and comfortable on your first, 10th, maybe 50th...but definitely not last cold weather ride.

Proper dress for the cold will keep you warm, cool and dry all at the same time. Over-dressing can be as bad as under-dressing. As in any active, outdoor endeavor, layering is the number one step in proper clothing selection. Number two is to choose the right fabrics. Today, this is very easy, since almost all sporting goods store carry lines of clothing made with modern, wicking, insulating and sometimes waterproof fabrics. I'll make it easy for you as we go over some suggestions for dressing from head-to-toe. (You may have to modify these suggestions up or down, based on your personal polar bear quotient)

Your Head

Keep your head warm. It'll keep you from being miserable. Your ears are probably the most vulnerable, so cover them up with a pair of ear muffs, a head band or a full head sock or balaclava.

Temp:	50+	Headband or a handkerchief
	40-50	Headband or earmuffs
	30-40	Earmuffs or balaclava
	20-30	Fleece balaclava
	< 20	Full face balaclava

Your Upper Body

Remember that you are a heat producing machine. When you ride, you will be producing a HUGE amount of heat and moisture. These byproducts must be removed from your clothing or you will overheat. In temperatures above 30 degrees, I only wear two layers on my upper body: A wicking base layer (like a Patagonia Capaline or EMS Bergelene) and a winter riding jacket. Add a pair of arm warmers under the base layer and I can regulate temps with the zippers and I'm good for the day. Be careful with windproof tops, they can trap a lot of moisture and leave you wet and overheated, then wet and cold if you take them off. Leave that heavy ski parka at home, it's meant for the slopes, not the bike. Get a nice winter riding jacket (with rear pockets).

Temp:	50+	Long sleeve jersey and short sleeved base layer
	40-50	Long sleeve jersey and long sleeved base layer
	30-40	Winter riding jacket and long sleeved base layer
	20-30	Winter riding jacket, long sleeved base layer and short sleeved

wicking T-shirt or jersey, maybe arm warmers

< 20 Winter riding jacket, 2 long sleeved base layers, arm warmers

Your Lower Body

Your lower body is doing the most work and needs some special attention. Those big thigh and back-side muscles are flowing a lot of blood and need to be kept warm to keep your lower legs and feet warm. A combination of shorts and tights fit the bill here.

Temp:	50+	Shorts and maybe knee/leg warmers
	40-50	Shorts and leg warmers (maybe tights)
	30-40	Tights and padded shorts
	20-30	Tights, wicking base layer (long underwear) and padded shorts
	< 20	Tights, fleece tights, padded shorts

(I say padded shorts rather than padded tights here because you don't want to introduce a non-cycling specific pair of shorts next to your skin. The seams in "normal" shorts or tights may not be designed for cycling and may irritate/chafe in all the wrong places)

Feet

Your feet and hands are usually the number one and two most temperature sensitive parts of your body. If you don't choose wisely here, you will have a miserable, short ride. Start with good quality wool socks. Smart Wool and Fox River are two brands of great socks for all activities. Don't lace up/Velcro up/click up too tightly on your shoes: You want to keep them a little loose to encourage blood flow. Most bike shoes have lots of little vents in them to keep us cool in summer, but are no good at all in winter. Use a stretchy, fleece lined or neoprene pair of shoe covers or booties as needed to keep your tootsies toasty. And don't be afraid to use foot warmer packets if it's REALLY cold.

Temp:	50+	Regular socks
	40-50	Regular socks with toe covers
	30-40	Warm socks and toe/shoe covers
	20-30	Warm socks and booties
	< 20	Warm socks, booties and foot warmer packets

Hands

Cold hands are no fun at all. Normal fingered ski gloves don't work as well for cycling because our hands are sitting in the same position, basically motionless, for hours at a time. Switching to lobster gloves is both a great way to keep your digits warm AND have fun at the same time. Lobsters work like mittens, keeping your fingers together and warm.

Temp:	50+	Regular gloves
	40-50	Long fingered gloves
	30-40	Insulated gloves
	20-30	Lobster gloves
	< 20	Lobster gloves and heat packets

Before you start a ride, you've chosen wisely if your upper body feels just a little cool in your clothing selection. You'll start pumping out the heat once the ride begins. Don't be afraid to take off a layer, or unzip a little to regulate your body temperature. Happy winter riding!!