Being outdoors improves children’s health and wellbeing and offers special benefits during the cold winter months.

**Prevents sickness**

In the cold months, activities tend to move indoors where germs, dust, dirt, and dander recirculate (which is why we get sick more often in the winter). Breathing fresh air promotes wellness and decreases the likelihood of transmitting disease.

**Boosts Metabolism**

Why is your child comfortable in shorts and a T-shirt, while you’re all bundled up? Kids have more of what’s called “brown fat” which boosts metabolism and keeps them warmer! We can develop this helpful brown fat by being in the cold. More brown fat = more calories burned (and more warmth), even when resting!

**Improves overall wellbeing**

Playing in the dirt, grass, rain, and snow strengthens children’s immune systems, decreasing their chances of developing allergies. And study after study shows that being outdoors improves overall wellbeing. Even when it’s cold!

**Boosts mood**

Winter can be a time of heightened feelings of depression and anxiety, which have been amplified in recent years due to the pandemic. Outdoor activity releases endorphins, the “feel good” hormones which can lift our mood and decrease anxiety.

**Encourages movement**

Many children get significantly less exercise in the winter. Experts recommend making outdoor play a regular part of their daily routines. Outdoor play in the cold can mean using different muscles, such as for shoveling or walking in snow, or just playing differently than they do when it’s warm.

**Provides opportunities for unstructured play**

Unstructured and creative play time is important for children’s development. Having a regular time to go outside to move and play, provides an opportunity to create, problem-solve, and practice working things out.

**Tips**

- Make outdoor play a part of your year-round daily routine.
- There’s no bad weather, just bad clothing! No need to run out and buy anything special, though a waterproof outer layer may certainly extend their play time (warm boots and gloves). Help them layer up and keep an eye on younger children to make sure they warm up as needed.
- Incentivize time outdoors by offering a special warm treat after they’ve been out for a certain amount of time. Or use an incentive chart to encourage outdoor play and track your progress!