

Staying warm and dry

By MELISSA CLARAMUNT

Special to the Record-Eagle
Don't let Old Man

Winter keep you and your family indoors. Whether you get outside for a day of skiing or a stroll through town, dressing properly for the weather can add to everyone's comfort, enjoyment and safety.

Patagonia, a company specializing in outerwear, adopts a strong philosophy about dressing for winter weather — layering.

According to Patagonia, layering is “wearing several thin layers rather than a single thick one, so that warm air is trapped in the spaces between.”

Locally, Becky Phillips and B.J. Shawn, co-owners

of Bearcub Kid-Fitters in Petoskey, emphasize that layering is critical for both adults and children.

Shawn and Phillips offer these suggestions about how and what to layer: the top layer should be wind- and waterproof and the bottom layer should be a wicking material, capable of absorbing the body's moisture away from the skin and allowing it to evaporate.

This is important particularly for those who are active outdoors. When physical activity ceases, the body won't remain chilled from damp clothing because the layer touching the skin is dry. Such technical clothing is primarily made of polyester and can be found in a variety of weights. This hi-tech shift in long underwear makes the old form of cotton long underwear seem archaic.

And don't forget about the layers in between.

With a wind/waterproof layer on top and a wicking layer next to the skin, what goes between should be determined by the day's weather and the level of activity. Most often, a fleece layer is beneficial, since it keeps the body warm and can dry quickly.

While layering helps to keep the body warm, it is also convenient when the body gets too hot. If you've misjudged the weather or have exerted a lot of energy, just remove a layer to help your body reach a comfortable temperature.

Kay Harper, who owns Jordan Valley Outfitters with her husband, Scott, stresses two important clothing items: a hat and a pair of wicking socks.

Because the body loses heat through the head, wearing a hat holds in the body's heat, keeping you warmer and more comfortable. Staying dry to the tips of your toes is also critical for the body's warmth and comfort.

Wicking socks are designed for this purpose, keeping feet dry by carrying moisture away from the skin. One example of a wicking sock is a line called Smartwool — wool socks that keep the foot warm with a wicking ability to keep the foot dry. It comes in a variety of weights, designed for



many activities. Choose your sock based on how and when you want it to function, whether it be for skiing, hiking or anything between.

Finally, there are a few medical reminders. Wendy Walker, M.D., a family physician with Little Traverse Primary Care in Harbor Springs, offers a good cold gauge for parents. When parents start to feel the cold, she said, it is probably time to take the kids inside.

Additionally, she reminds those that have Raynaud's Syndrome to take extra precaution. Raynaud's is a condition where hands and feet turn white or blue in the cold due to poor capillary circulation; here, additional protection is needed for the extremi-

ties to prevent frostbite.

Walker also said it is important to understand the symptoms and stages of frostbite. Frostbite is freezing of the skin or underlying tissues that results from prolonged exposure to cold and occurs in three stages. First degree is frostnip, a numbness and whitening of skin; second degree is superficial frostbite, with outer skin hard and frozen but tissue underneath normal and blistering likely; third degree is deep frostbite, with white or blotchy blue skin, both outer skin and tissue underneath is hard and cold, and medical attention is needed. Frostbitten areas should be rewarmed with warm water, wrap in blankets or soft material, and, to avoid further tissue damage, should not be rubbed.

To ensure the health, comfort and safety for you and your family, Dr. Walker offers these words of winter wisdom:

- Layer clothing.
- Consider mittens over gloves, they keep hands warmer.
- Ensure proper sizing. The tighter the clothing and gear, the colder they will be. Proper sizing allows room for body heat to circulate.
- Use sunscreen and lip balm with a minimum SPF 15; reapply every few hours. Winter sun can be damaging as it reflects off of the snow.
- Wear sunglasses. Eye protection is critical, even for the little tikes.
- Stay hydrated. Even though it's not the summer heat, the body is still losing fluids and needs to be rehydrated.
- Don't consume alcohol or smoke when in the extreme cold; constriction of the arteries will occur, reducing the blood flow to the skin.
- Don't take children out for a prolonged period of time if the temperature is below 20 degrees.