



# Wee Learn

## Wee Builders (3 – 4 years): Why Kids Should Play Outdoors in the Winter



As winter and cold weather approaches, children's play is often limited to the indoors. Adult fears about safety and negative attitudes toward exposure to cold weather are the barriers that prevent children from accessing outdoor play in winter months. It is common to hear adults say that "my child will not like being in the cold weather," or "the cold is too dangerous to play in," or "there's nothing to play with." After all, play should not be restricted to warm weather. The benefits of children playing outside are:

- 1. Children get to see the outdoors through a new lens.** During the summer months, children become used to the warm, green climate that the season has to offer. After the change in season or the first snowfall, children view their environment through a different lens: fallen leaves, brown grass, snow, and ice. This new lens enables them to imagine the outdoors differently and to be creative and play in different ways.
- 2. Increases in Exercise and Using Different Muscles.** The winter months provide us with different ways of moving our bodies, such as sledding, walking up a snow hill, or building a snowman. Our larger muscles are put to great use in the winter months due to the challenges that snow provides. This large-muscle use and increase in physical activity support children's gross motor development and overall health.
- 3. Getting Fresh Air and Avoiding Bacteria.** Most adults associate the winter months with getting colds and illnesses such as the flu. However, it is not the cold weather that necessarily causes colds and flus – it is increased exposure to indoor environments where bacteria and viruses live.
- 4. New Challenges and Problem-Solving.** The winter environment provides children with opportunities for new challenges, such as sliding down the ice patch and climbing a snow hill. Engagement with outdoor environments in the winter provokes new problem-solving skills – "How can I slide down this ice patch without falling?" "How fast can I run up this snow hill?" "Can I climb this tree using a branch as a snow pick?" The ever-changing environments that the winter months have to offer provide children with the challenges that they so often crave.
- 5. Vitamin D Exposure.** When we stay indoors during the winter, we are not only missing out on play, but also on necessary vitamins that the outdoor environment gives us. Children get vitamin D through sun exposure, and absorb it even though the sun is not as warm in the winter. It is recommended that you get at least half an hour of playtime outdoors in the winter.

<https://www.fix.com/blog/keep-kids-playing-outdoors-in-winter>

