

3 Easy Steps To Successful XC Fitness

Step #1

Have a plan.

Most recreational skiers think only racers need to have a plan for XC fitness. But no matter what your goals are, your age, or your current fitness level...absolutely everyone can benefit from planning how, when and why's related to being fit for your XC ski adventures.

What's involved?

Start out by making a list of fitness goals and objectives for the upcoming winter. This list certainly does not have to be (and should not be) limited to XC Skiing! Go ahead and add other sports and activities, lifestyle items, anything that comes to mind. Make sure that your goals and objectives reflect an honest progression from where you now to where you'd like to be.

For example...Beth could set a goal of skiing that 30km tour route she always wanted to do. Her objective would be to maintain a steady fitness routine for six months prior to her target tour date. Another goal could be simply to enter the winter in better shape so she has more fun and can last longer on skis in the early season.

Once you have a rough idea of what you'd ideally like to accomplish, write down a rough month-by-month outline of what you are going to be doing training/fitness-wise throughout the year leading up to the next ski season. This "plan" can be a super-detailed blueprint or it can be a few scribbles on one sheet of paper. The point is to have something written down that you can refer to, adjust and expand upon as the year unfolds.

Finally, put your plan in a place that you'll be sure to see it on a regular basis. If you keep a fitness journal (a very good idea even for non-racers), that's a perfect spot. The fridge can also be a motivating location. A record of your fitness progress allows you to celebrate little victories on a continuous basis. A personal best in a strength exercise, for example, or being able to do an aerobic activity 10 minutes longer. Being able to see written progress is one of the best ways to keep following any fitness plan, but combined with activity-specific goals....now that's a recipe for success!

Step #2

Use a creative variety of workouts, intensities, locations and partners.

An easy way to abandon the most detailed and well-intentioned training plan is to go out and mindlessly plug away day after day doing the same kinds of workouts at the same places at the same pace. Boring. Although some folks love a set routine, for most of us, our minds, bodies and spirits need constant variety

American Olympic silver medallist Bill Koch once said that he tried to never do the exact same workout. Even if he just changed one little thing about a specific workout, Koch felt that change was the essence of developing as an athlete and enjoying training rather than looking at it as drudgery. This perspective is just as valuable for recreational skiers as it is for elite competitors. After all, if you only have a precious few hours to spend staying fit each week, you surely need to be as creative with that time as you possibly can be!

What can you do to spice up your routine?

Go out and try new training methods. If you've never roller skied, they can be a great investment for year-round skiing fitness and fun--particularly if you have plenty of paved multi-user paths nearby. Incorporate different kinds of regular strength workouts into your weekly plan. One day you might use circuits. Another day you might work on traditional weights. Another day you might do plyometrics and body weight exercises. Borrow or pick up a used canoe/kayak and go paddling if you have water nearby--great for skiers' upper bodies! Instead of just running or hiking, mix up things where you jog flats and downhill and hike or bound uphill. Go check out a state park or wilderness trail you've never been to for a weekend workout. Plan a long weekend roadtrip for a spot where you can have a mini-"training camp" with plenty of different activities. Be on the lookout for different training partners or new ones you can add to a "group"

Step #3

The more you want to improve, the more specific you'll want to be.

If you are just interested in staying fit year-round with a variety of activities (XC skiing among them), the need for specific training methods is pretty low except for the final 2-3 months prior to the ski season. On the other hand, if you start to have competitive aspirations or if you have an ambitious tour planned that is really going to stretch your fitness envelope, you will need to be more specific in order to reach your goals.

What is specific?

Start out with staying on snow as much as you possibly can throughout the year. Most folks can't afford the resources (principally time and money) to travel to glaciers or to opposite hemispheres and most folks don't live in areas with accessible year-round snow...but you can make the most of the snow in your area as long as it lasts.

Off snow, your most specific training choices are roller skiing, ski imitation foot exercises, and running in ski-specific terrain. Although in-line skates are an acceptable alternative to roller skiing (particularly if your competitive goals are not all that ambitious or if fitness is the primary goal), more serious skiers should stick with roller skiing to be truly considered "ski specific". Specific strength exercises in the gym or out "in the field" are also a critical part of a XC skier's fitness routine.

One easy way to stay on top of specific XC training ideas is to check out the Workout of the Week posted nearly every week on xcskiworld.com (*check out the navigation menu up top*). Although primarily written for racers, recreational skiers can easily adjust the workouts to a more casual orientation...and get a great workout along the way!

