



PO Box 98  
Girdwood, AK 99587  
907-783-1245  
[www.AlaskaFit.com](http://www.AlaskaFit.com)  
[info@AlaskaFit.com](mailto:info@AlaskaFit.com)

Fitness Corner by Ginny Grupp  
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Summer is just around the corner and as dreams of long days and summer playing dance in your head, it's also time to think about all of the muscles that have been resting and relaxing throughout the winter months. Yes, it's only April, and yes, it's a still good six weeks 'til spring is even here in earnest. And no, you shouldn't wait 'til one week before your 3-night backpacking trip to hike Bird Ridge in a last-ditch effort to "get in shape" for it.

Generally speaking, the body will need 6-8 weeks for what is known as initial conditioning. Initial conditioning refers to the physiological changes that the body makes in order to accommodate increased physical activity. If you've been active skiing, snowboarding or XC skiing throughout the winter, you are in a better fitness position than if you've been hibernating on the couch, but it is still a good idea to begin activating the muscles you haven't been using and that you will need for summertime activities.

If you have chosen take advantage of the dark, chilly winter months by catching up on all of the sleep you missed over the summer, now is the time to dust off the cobwebs and get moving. The most user-friendly activity to begin with is some brisk walking (don't forget your grippers if you're heading outside and it's icy). Brisk walking does not mean strolling and chatting with friends (although if you can get your friends to walk with you, all the better). It means moving at a pace that gets your heart rate up and has you breathing quicker. A conversational pace—one at which you can carry on a conversation, but not necessarily speak in paragraphs, more like long sentences—is your goal. This is an activity that you can work into your everyday life—walk to the local market, the library, or around town to do local errands. You know your own fitness level, so don't overdo it on the first day out.

Following are a few everyday, simple suggestions to focus on as you make your summer play plans. I've focused on general conditioning with a few specific recommendations. These are ideas to help get you started and hopefully make your first time out for the season more fun and less painful. This is not a formal training program.

**Increase your aerobic capacity and strengthen the hamstrings:** Skiing and other winter sports are great off-season conditioners for many summer activities as your legs are constantly active. If you've been regularly XC skiing, your aerobic capacity should be in pretty good shape. If not, you may want to focus on increasing your aerobic capacity so that you are able to hike, bike, kayak for longer distances. If you've been skiing or boarding, you may also want to strengthen your hamstrings as these sports trigger the quadriceps and gluteal muscles more than the hamstrings, there may be some imbalances as you go from one season to the next. The simplest way is get outside and do some brisk walking or if you're up to it, go for a run. Walking/running on flat terrain triggers your hamstrings and calves more than your quads, evening out imbalances that you may have due to winter activities. As you progress towards hills, your quads will



PO Box 98  
Girdwood, AK 99587  
907-733-1245  
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[info@AlaskaFit.com](mailto:info@AlaskaFit.com)

pick up more of the work. Start slow, don't jump into 8-milers at this stage, just get your heart rate up and get moving. You'll want to get out there 3-5 times per week.

**Fortify your core:** Your core muscles include the abdominal and back muscles as well as the muscles in the lumbo-pelvic area (think low back and hips). All movement originates from the core. It may not always seem like it, but think for a moment about any activity from swinging a baseball bat to lifting something off the floor, to kicking a soccer ball. If your core is weak, the limbs involved in the movement will not have enough momentum (generated in the core) to perform the task well without straining other muscles. The core is also responsible for holding us upright and keeping us balanced. So, as you've been making your way down the mountain, these muscles have been activated regularly. To strengthen them, you will want to do some abdominal exercises (i.e., planks, crunches, reverse crunches, oblique crunches) and balance that with some back exercises (i.e., back extension). A strong core will help with activities like kayaking, golf, baseball/softball, hiking, backpacking, swimming, even bike riding.

**Build up your upper body:** The upper body takes a bit of a break for most winter activities. While your core has been activated during these activities keeping you balanced, the arms and shoulders haven't been quite as active. As you head to the water for activities such as kayaking or swimming, you will want to work on shoulders (i.e., lateral raise, shoulder press), back (i.e., lateral pull-downs, chin-ups), chest (i.e., push-ups, chest press, bench press) and core (see above). Don't forget about the rotator cuff. It is an area that is easy to target, but is often neglected and requires its own separate set of exercises.

Remember, consistency is key to all of this. Wouldn't it be great to begin the season feeling as good as you did by the end of the season last year? Just a little bit of preparation goes a long way. Now's the time—go outside and play!!