MYTHIC GEAR

Stay Dry
Paddle More
Spend Less

All the Ways to Stay Dry and Warm – or Not

(Wetsuits, Drysuits, Semi-Dry Suits, Two-Piece, One-Piece, Hybrid, Front-Entry, Back Entry, Dry Tops, Splash Tops)

The weather's cooling down and so is the water. Anyone who wants to continue paddling their kayak, canoe, stand up paddleboard, raft or other watercraft into the cold months needs to consider how they're going to say warm and safe. Because make no mistake: if you end up in the water and you don't stay warm, you are in danger.

But there's more to it than safety, that boring subject about which no one wants to be preached. Staying warm is about also about doing more paddling and having more fun. If you go paddling and get wet and cold, you're not having fun: you're having a miserable, totally-not-fun time. And if you've done that once or twice, you've probably stopped paddling in cold weather – another way to have a not very fun time. On the other hand, if you dress appropriately for cold water, you can more or less laugh at cold water and continue kayaking, canoeing, paddle boarding, rafting, etc., into the cold months with comfort and safety – and that means having fun as long as there's open water.

The Sobek drysuit from Mythic Gear is a one-piece, front-entry design.

There are many ways to stay dry and warm – more or less – when you paddle. Here are the main options and their pros and cons:

Wetsuits

Wetsuits are made of neoprene, a synthetic, closed-cell foam rubber. A wetsuit is waterproof from the outside, but it doesn't keep the water out if you end up in the water. If that happens, the water rushes in and you'll get hit with a blast of cold. But the millions of air pockets in the foam rubber do provide effective insulation, which will help you resist hypothermia. The duration of the protection varies with the thickness of the suit, which can range from 0.5mm to 6mm.

Drysuits

Paddling drysuits actually keep you dry if you swim. They have waterproof zippers and stretchy rubber seals, called gaskets, around the neck and wrists to keep water out. Most drysuits for paddlesports are made from a multi-layer nylon fabric with a membrane that allows moisture from your perspiration to escape but keeps water out. You wear additional clothing inside the drysuit for insulation, and it stays dry – and you stay warm – if you end up in the water. Although drysuits are more expensive than wetsuits, they keep you warmer and safer, and most users agree that they're much more comfortable. Here are the main variations on drysuits:

One-piece drysuit
These cover you from the neck to the ankles or the toes. (Attached to the ends of the legs are either ankle gaskets or waterproof socks.) The great advantage of a one-piece suit is the reliability of its water-tight performance. One-piece drysuits come in two further sub-types:

- *Front-entry:* The entry zipper runs diagonally across the chest. These are easier to put on and take off, but some people find that the zipper gets in the way when they're paddling.

- *Back-entry:* The entry zipper runs horizontally across the shoulders, behind the neck. These can be difficult to zip and unzip without a helper, but they avoid the comfort issues associated with front-entry zippers.

Two-piece drysuit
These consist of a separate jacket and pants that join together around the waist. The advantage of this arrangement is that you can wear either the top or bottom half separately. The disadvantages are that it can be difficult to properly arrange the seal around the waist between the two parts, and vigorous movement may cause the seal to separate, negating the "dry" part should you end up in the water. One manufacturer makes a two-piece suit in which the parts join together with a waterproof zipper. This is bulky and expensive but reliable.

Hybrid drysuit
These have a neoprene bottom half and a nylon fabric upper half. They're favored by some surfers and water skiers because the neoprene pants are form-fitting, making swimming easier, while the breathable fabric top half is more comfortable and allows better freedom of motion.

Full neoprene drysuit
We mention the full neoprene drysuit only for reference, since it's used only by divers, almost never by paddlers. They provide excellent thermal protection, but the thick neoprene top half would greatly impede freedom of movement and comfort while paddling.

Dry Top, Dry Pants
Both are made of waterproof (usually breathable) fabric, and have rubber gaskets at the wrists or ankles, and both are effective at keeping their respective halves of the body dry against any amount of splashing. But they do not have a truly waterproof seal around the waist, so they will not keep the water out if you've *in* the water.

Semi-Dry Suit
These are much like regular one-piece drysuits, but they lack fully watertight gaskets at the neck and wrists. They'll keep you dry through almost any splashing, but if you swim, water will enter.

Splash Top
Also known as a paddling jacket, a splash top is much like a semi-dry suit for the top half. It's a waterproof, but not water-tight, garment that will keep you dry against splashing but won't keep you dry if you swim.

Read more on why you should wear a drysuit.

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