

5 Reasons to Run Outdoors This Winter

By Trisha Reeves • For Active.com

As the mercury drops in many parts of the world and swimsuits are traded in for sweatshirts, runners are retreating to the local sports clubs and hitting the treadmills for the winter months.

But just because there's ice on your windshield doesn't mean you have to hibernate like a ground squirrel. Here are five reasons you should bundle up and run outdoors when the snow season hits.

1. You Don't Get Hot

The first and most obvious benefit to running outside in the winter is that you aren't likely to overheat. Because of this, winter running is actually somewhat easier. Heat and humidity slow you down and can make you want to stop running before your planned mileage is up. Even in the gym, the air can get sticky. But outside in the fresh air you can maintain a comfortable temperature for a long time with just a couple of [moisture-wicking layers](#) on.

2. It Prepares You for Races

Sure, in a pinch the treadmill is a great tool. Everyone has their cold threshold, when it's just too frigid to be outside. And there are some days when the snow and ice make the roads too perilous for running. But the smooth surface and human-propelling belt of a treadmill can leave your training regimen...well, a little flat.

If you're preparing for that big spring marathon you're much better off training in conditions that are similar to those on race day. On the graded and uneven surface of the road, you'll be training your muscles, joints and lungs to handle the real thing. The mill can't give you the same workout that the pavement can, so running outdoors as much as possible can get your body in line come race day.

3. It Builds Your Mental and Physical Toughness

Pulling on that [gear](#) and heading out into the 20 degree day can be a hard thing to do when your house is (and your toes are) nice and warm. Not to mention the fact that there's dirty snow on the ground, the trees are nothing to look at and your running partners have all disappeared. Many say that running is about mental toughness; well, this is a good time to gain some.

Running in the cold improves your physical endurance; the intense weather can program your body to operate better in adverse conditions, thereby increasing your stamina. Also, you'll get used to the cold after awhile, and the increase in blood circulation can keep you warmer while you're at rest. Learn to love racking up miles out in the chilly tundra, and you'll become a much stronger runner.

4. It Curbs the Winter Blues

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) gets to a fair amount of those who live in the chilliest climates, especially after the holidays are over. But even if you don't get the winter blues, a dose of fresh air and sunshine is good for you. It can boost your mood and keep you motivated while everyone else is sleeping late and complaining about the snow.

5. It Keeps Off the Winter Bulge

The term “bathing suit season” was coined for a reason: most everyone spends the spring and summer on some [diet](#), trying to lose the winter weight and regain their shape. But you don’t have to let the colder months turn you into a lazy pile of mush.

You can stay motivated and challenged all winter long by keeping up on those outdoor miles. Your swimsuit will thank you. So ask for some running gloves and a neck-warming gaiter for the holidays, and run outdoors this winter. You might even surprise yourself and find that you love it.

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