

6 tips for exercising in the dark

Winter's shorter days affect everyone, but 4:30 p.m. sunsets may be toughest for the fitness set. Gone are the post-work outdoor runs and rides under the sun. On the bright side (pun intended), less UV protection is necessary. But safety is a bigger concern. Darkness increases the likelihood of accident or injury while working out. You are less visible to others and your own vision is restricted. Here are a few tips to help maximize your safety and minimize your risk of injury while sweating in the dark.

1) Move in the Right Direction

Bike with traffic and run against traffic. This rule of thumb applies for all times of the day. Running against the flow of traffic allows you to watch everything coming your way--cars, buses, bikes, etc. Even at a five minute per mile running pace, oncoming traffic can see you from afar and you should have reaction time to get out of the path of any oncoming danger. As drivers increasingly text and talk on the telephone, all it takes is a momentary swerve of the car to cause an impact. Runners with their back to an oncoming swerving vehicle don't have a chance to react.

2) Be Reflective

Darkness creates even more danger for exercisers. People driving to work before sunrise and returning home after sunset are not thinking about encountering joggers and cyclists. Likely they're either waking up or zoning out. Cellphones, radios and fatigue certainly don't help attention spans. While bicycle lights of some type are required in all states for night riding, reflective clothing and gear helps cyclists and joggers stand out. A few popular and useful items to increase visibility: a reflective vest, glow-in-the-dark stickers that affix to your hat and shoes, and Velcro wrist and ankle bands.

3) See Clearly

When the midday sun shines brightly, you wouldn't think of heading out without your wrap-around dark-lens shades. Protecting your eyes during all outdoor workouts is prudent, especially when cycling. But dark tinted lenses will hinder your sightlines at dawn and dusk. Instead, use clear or red tint lenses to protect your eyes from flying objects (stones, dust, etc.) and enhance your vision. Rudy Project and Oakley offer some of the best active-glasses in the business with interchangeable lenses.

4) Brighten Your Day

Don't wear black or other dark colors, especially if riding a bike. There's an important reason most cycling jerseys and kits sport loud and bright hues--safety. Radiant yellows, oranges, reds and greens aren't the most fashionable color combinations, but they may just save your life. Runners and walkers should stick with simple and plain white for their top layer.

5) Creature Comforts

In many parts of the U.S., mountain and off-road trails are popular routes for runners, cyclists and hikers. While automobile traffic isn't a concern on the meandering paths, big critters should be. Mountain lions, snakes and other potentially dangerous creatures are most active at dawn and dusk. Heading out with a pocket-size mace/pepper spray can help protect you if confronted by an uninvited training partner of the slithering or four-legged kind.

6) Early Bird

While daylight ends earlier in the evening, setting the clocks back does offer earlier morning sun. Your commute and morning routine at home may not allow for an entire workout without darkness. But setting out before or at sunrise is the best way to guarantee it actually occurs. A stressful day with co-workers or the kids, unforeseen traffic jams and/or meetings that run long can challenge the motivation of even the most dedicated exercisers.