

# 8 Ways to Plan Ahead for an Active Winter

*American Running Association*

Are you one of those folks who like to ease back during winter? Although you can enjoy skiing and skating at this time of the year, there are good reasons to regard winter as a chance to take a steady recovery period, just as nature does, in order to come back re-energized and ready to enjoy spring. But although you let your body take a break, there's no reason to let your mind lose interest. Here are some suggestions to help you prepare for a new season.

**Check your gear.** Now is the time to inspect your shoes; don't stop at checking for wear, but prod, poke, and twist to be sure they are not becoming unstable. Shoe materials, such as heel counters, can begin to break down before you can actually see anything wrong.

**Check your clothes to make sure they will still fit when you need them.** Waistbands losing their elasticity? Any shirts that have shrunk enough to be a bit tight? Any socks that stay stiff even after laundering? Put them on the inactive list before they cause problems. Is your watchband cracking? Replace it now before it snaps and flies off during a workout.

**Even though you want to be less active physically, you can still be involved with your favorite sport.** Volunteer to help out at a race or on one of the committees that make your sport possible. If you have only a few hours on odd occasions, remember many events begin with something as simple as stuffing envelopes, and somebody has to do it. These activities will keep you in touch with other folks who have the same interests as you have.

**Choose one or two goals for the coming year.** If you compete, now is the time to browse the coming year's race calendar. Setting valuable objectives is both science and art. There is science in planning the execution, but making your goals achievable but challenging, sustainable but fresh and interesting is an art that takes constant practice.

**Make a list of experiments to try when spring comes round again.** There are suggestions you've read about that could make you fitter, faster, and stronger. Have you tried carbohydrate supplements during training, or hill workouts for leg strength? How about trying bike intervals instead of track intervals to reduce wear and tear on your legs and feet? Write down your list and then set priorities to try things one at a time, because if you make more than one change and you improve, you won't know what did the trick.

**How about putting a little more adventure into your life by trying something new; maybe combine something different with a vacation.** Running, cycling, and weight training may be the foundation of your activities, but how would you shape up and enjoy a completely new experience, such as rock climbing, or white water canoeing? Try half a dozen tennis lessons, or golf lessons. You may have an aptitude that you haven't yet discovered. You won't know if you don't try.

**Catch up on your reading.** If you have a pile of magazines and newsletters, and a few self-improvement books waiting to be read, now's the time. If you don't catch up now you never will, because when the days grow longer and the sun climbs higher you will have a choice between reading about it and going out to do it; which will you choose?

**Don't forget your head.** You spend time reading workout schedules, exercise routines, and all that physical stuff. This is a good time to soak up a little philosophy and psychology. Exercise, fitness, and sports and athletic competition carry over into the rest of your life, because all activities, physical and mental, take motivation, goal setting, planning, dedication, and a desire to do your best as a route to self-esteem. George Sheehan was the master of relating the thoughts of the great thinkers and writers to sports, especially running. Fitness and performance are worthwhile as far as physical health benefits are concerned, but their greatest value is in helping us to be better people, so that we develop the skills that really matter: relationships, love, family, and friends. Winter is a good time to browse good books and give your mind some workouts.