

9 Tips for Running in Cold Weather

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One of the great things about running is that it's a sport you can indulge in all year round. Whether the temperature is chilly or hot and humid, with some reasonable precautions you can still get out there and enjoy your daily runs.

Running in cold weather does require a certain amount of planning to ensure that you don't end up freezing on the side of the road somewhere. There's nothing more unpleasant than being miles from home in the shivering cold with no way to get back other than on foot. Here are some preventative measures to ensure this doesn't happen to you:

4 Tips to Dress Properly for Running in Cold Weather

How you dress for the elements can make or break your winter runs. This doesn't mean you should pile on all the clothes you can possibly manage to stay warm. It is possible to dress too warmly, and the result can leave you sweaty and uncomfortable.

The rules for dressing properly are:

1. Dress in layers.

Wearing several thin layers of clothing helps trap warm air between each layer keeping you considerably warmer than if you were to wear one heavy layer. This includes socks; wearing two pairs of polypropylene socks keeps your feet warmer and drier than one heavy pair.

2. Wear the right fabrics.

One area where modern runners have a huge advantage on those who started out in the running boom of the late 1970s and 80s is in the types of fabric available for running gear. Materials such as polypropylene, capilene, and some wool/synthetic blends wick moisture away from your body and keep you as warm and dry as possible.

Avoid wearing cotton because it doesn't wick moisture and also has very little insulating ability, which will leave you wet, cold and uncomfortable.

3. Wear a protective shell.

It's critical that you wear some sort of waterproof windbreaker or shell to protect you from the wind and precipitation. Gore-Tex is the best material to wear as it does a great job of releasing moisture from the body while also keeping out moisture from the outside elements. Nylon also does a reasonable job for a lesser price.

4. Cover exposed skin as much as possible.

A hat and gloves are absolutely necessary once the temperature dips below freezing. Your body will lose that majority of its heat through any exposed skin, so cover up as much as possible. If it's really cold, you can cover exposed areas such as your face with Vaseline to reduce the potential of frostbite.

5 Safety Tips for Running in Cold Weather

Running in cold weather presents some unique safety concerns. Extreme temperatures can even pose life-threatening risks if you don't take some basic precautions.

1. Always tell someone where you're going and when you expect to arrive home.

Make sure that at least one competent person is aware of your plans. If you don't arrive as expected, they'll recognize that you're missing and know where to look for you.

2. Always wear reflective gear when running after dark.

Due to the decrease in daylight hours, it's more likely that you'll be running in the dark during the winter. Make sure you wear light-colored, reflective clothing so that you can easily be seen by oncoming vehicles.

3. Run short loops.

When it's cold outside, consider running multiple laps of a short course, rather than one longer loop. This ensures that you'll never be far from home in the event of an emergency. Running a short course also ensures that you won't be heading into bad weather for an extended period of time, which, aside from being extremely unpleasant, can significantly lower your body temperature.

4. Be careful rounding corners.

At least once a year I manage to fall flat on my face after stepping on an icy surface. The biggest risk occurs when you try to change direction with ice underfoot. Make sure you go very slowly when turning corners and be very careful on icy surfaces. Don't worry about losing fitness by running a bit slower; the main goal is to get through the run without pulling a muscle or injuring yourself in a fall.

5. Carry your cell phone, identification and some cash with you for an emergency.

If you run into a major problem, make sure you have your cell phone handy and enough cash to get you home if necessary. This is good advice for any run -- year-round. Sometimes unavoidable circumstances can leave you stranded and you definitely do not want to find yourself out in the cold, unable to run, and several miles from home without help.