

Winter Running: Helping Your Feet Survive

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For Active.com*

As the days shorten and the weather cools, running becomes more difficult. Many times it may seem more inviting to curl up with a good book and a warm cup of tea as opposed to bundling up and facing the elements.

For those who are motivated enough to run through the cold, dark winter days, it is important to know how to protect the feet so they too can survive the winter months.

1. Wear one pair of light or medium weight (depending on the temperature) synthetic socks. Don't wear cotton socks. Synthetic socks wick away moisture and help prevent blister formation and cold feet.
2. Consider running in a trail shoe. Trail running shoes will help protect your feet more than lighter nylon running shoes. Trail shoes also tend to have more tread on the bottom to add traction for slippery surfaces.
3. Make sure your shoes fit. If your feet tend to swell a little in the summer, then your shoes may be a little loose in the winter. If you tend to wear heavier socks in the winter, this may not be an issue. If not, you may find your cold toes are being jammed against the front of the shoes when running hills and your heel may be slipping and causing blisters.
4. Avoid tight footwear in cold weather. Tight shoes may decrease circulation to the toes. The cold weather also will decrease the circulation to the extremities, and the combination can lead to problems.
5. Pair your socks and shoes. Don't assume your heavier socks will work with your summer running shoes. The reverse is also true. Your summer running socks may not work with your winter or "muddy" running shoes.
6. Don't pull out your old shoes for winter running. You may not want to wear your new running shoes in the rain, but make sure you do not start your winter running in shoes that have 400 - 500 miles on them.
7. Warm up slowly. Your muscles will take longer to warm up in colder weather. Without proper warm-up time, you will increase your chance of injury.
8. Minimize running on uneven ground. When running on uneven terrain, your body needs to quickly adapt to the rocks, roots or dips. In cold weather, it is more difficult to adjust to uneven terrain because your muscles do not react as quickly. This will increase your chances of developing muscle strains and sprains.
9. Break in your shoes. Make sure you have at least 75 - 80 miles of running on your shoes before wearing them in a winter marathon.
10. Consider cross-training. If you are feeling more stiff and sore than usual or are experiencing foot, ankle or leg discomfort, take a break from running. Overuse injuries occur more frequently in the winter as runners unconsciously alter their gait to adapt to slippery, hard-to-see surfaces. Consider occasional visits to the gym or embracing the elements on cross-country skis or a bicycle.

Christine Dobrowolski is a podiatrist and the author of [Those Aching Feet: Your Guide to Diagnosis and Treatment of Common Foot Problems](#). To learn more about Dr. Dobrowolski and her book, visit www.skipublishing.com or www.northcoastfootcare.com.