

Cold Weather Running Safety Tips:

How to Keep Running Outside in the Winter

Falling temperatures and fewer daylight hours don't mean that your outdoor running routine has to go into hibernation for the winter. Running through the cold weather can help shake those winter blues, improve your energy level, and guarantee that you'll be in better shape once bathing suit season rolls around. Follow these tips for cold weather running:

Dress in Layers

Start with a thin layer of synthetic material such as polypropylene, which wicks sweat from your body. Stay away from cotton because it holds the moisture and will keep you wet. An outer, breathable layer of nylon or Gore-Tex will help protect you against wind and precipitation, while still letting out heat and moisture to prevent overheating and chilling. If it's really cold out, you'll need a middle layer, such as polar fleece, for added insulation.

Protect Your Hands and Feet

As much as 30% of your body heat escapes through your hands and feet. On mild days, wear [running gloves](#) that wick moisture away. Mittens are a better choice on colder days because your fingers will share their body heat. You can also tuck [disposable heat packets](#) into your mittens. Add a wicking sock liner under a warm polar fleece or wool sock, but make sure you have enough room in your running shoes to accommodate these thicker socks.

Pay Attention to Temperature and Wind Chill

If the wind is strong, it penetrates your clothes and removes the insulating layer of warm air around you. Your movement also creates wind chill because it increases air movement past your body. If the temperature dips below zero or the wind chill is below minus 20, hit the treadmill instead.

Avoid Overdressing

You're going to warm up once you get moving, so you should feel a little bit chilly when you start your run. A good rule of thumb: Dress as if it's 20 degrees warmer outside than it really is.

Don't Forget Your Head

About 40% of your body heat is lost through your head. Wearing a hat will help prevent heat loss, so your circulatory system will have more heat to distribute to the rest of the body. When it's really cold, wear a face mask or a scarf over your mouth to warm the air you breathe and protect your face.

Watch for Frostbite

On really cold days, make sure you monitor your fingers, toes, ears, and nose. They may feel numb at first, but they should warm up a few minutes into your run. If you notice a patch of hard, pale, cold skin, you may have frostbite. Get out of the cold immediately and slowly warm the affected area. If numbness continues, seek emergency care.

Check With Your MD

Cold air can trigger chest pain or asthma attacks in some people. Before braving the elements, talk to your doctor if you have any medical conditions or concerns about exercising outdoors.

Get Some Shades

The glare from snow can cause snow blindness, so wear sunglasses (polarized lenses are best) to avoid this problem.

Don't Stay in Wet Clothes

If you get wet from rain, [snow](#), or sweat in cold temperatures, you're at an increased risk for hypothermia, a lowering of your body temperature. If you're wet, change your clothes and get to warm shelter as quickly as possible. If you suspect hypothermia -- characterized by intense shivering, loss of coordination, slurred speech, and fatigue -- get emergency treatment immediately.

Stay Hydrated

Despite the cold weather, you'll still heat up and lose fluids through sweat. Cold air also has a drying effect, which can increase the risk of dehydration. Make sure you drink water or a sports drink before, during, and after your run.

Take It Easy When It's Frigid

You're at greater risk for a pulled muscle when running in the cold, so warm up slowly and run easy on very cold days. Save your tough workouts for milder days or indoors.

Be Visible

It's best to avoid running in the dark but, if you have to run at night, wear reflective gear and light-colored clothing. Dress in bright colors if you're running in the snow.

Run Into the Wind

If you head out into the wind, it will be at your back at the end of your workout, when you're sweaty and could catch a chill.

Remember Sunscreen

Sunburn is still possible in the winter because the snow reflects the sun's rays. Protect your lips with lip balm, too.