

Tips to embrace the outdoors and enjoy running in cold weather

December 28 2016, by Joshua Blomgren, Do



Credit: Rush University Medical Center

The downside of resolving to exercise more is that just about everyone else is doing the same thing. So if you're in a cold climate, that means

battling all those fickle New Year's resolution-makers for a coveted spot on the health club treadmill.

That is, unless you're willing to confront the cold and embrace the outdoors.

Depending on just how cold and snowy it is—temps in the low single digits or worse could be dangerous—the biggest obstacle is in your head. So don't think too much about it. Just dress properly and push yourself out the door, because nothing beats having the path or sidewalk to yourself on a snowy January day.

Here are a few tips for tackling the [cold weather](#):

What to wear

When in doubt, play it safe. "If it is particularly cold, a runner will want to make sure there's as little exposed skin as possible," says Joshua Blomgren, DO, a sports medicine specialist at Rush.

- **Layers:** The days of heavy winter running gear are long gone. Think layers, including a mix of lightweight and slightly thicker tops, along with a lightweight shell or jacket if it's extra cold or windy. And as any veteran runner knows, don't wear cotton. Synthetic gear like Nike's Dri-FIT wicks away moisture from your skin so you stay warmer. Newer wool products also help keep you warmer and drier.
- **Hats and gloves:** It probably goes without saying that you'll need these, as you can lose a lot of heat from your head and hands. Cold air also can irritate your lungs when you're exercising, Blomgren says, so on super-cold days, wearing a scarf or balaclava over the mouth and nose will help warm the air before you breathe it in.

- **Pants:** Some folks are uneasy with running tights, but they provide warmth and comfort in the cold. If you can't bring yourself to wear them, there are plenty of long but less form-fitting options. Forty degrees is usually a good threshold for when to ditch shorts in favor of long pants.
- **Reflective gear:** If it's overcast and gray, and particularly if it's dark, wear some bright-colored clothing or a reflective vest so drivers can see you. The vests are inexpensive and available at most running stores.

What to bring

- **Water:** Even when it's [cold](#), it's important to stay hydrated. In freezing climates, public fountains are often shut off during the winter months, so if you're running more than three miles, carry a water bottle with you. Some come with straps that make them easier to carry.
- **Fresh clothes:** Make sure you change quickly into dry clothes when you're done. Your perspiration-soaked gear won't feel so warm once you stop working out, and prolonged exposure could lead to dangerous hypothermia.
- **Cash and ID:** Always carry some identification, in case you're injured, along with cash to catch a cab. Taking your mobile phone along isn't a bad idea, either.

Coping with the elements

- **Cold:** The first few minutes might seem rough. But your body quickly warms up after you start running, and then, like clockwork, you're comfortable.
- **Wind:** Pay attention to which way the wind is blowing. Gusts that you don't even notice when they're at your back can seem brutal

when you turn around. Some runners prefer to face the wind for the first part of a run and save the more comfortable part for last.

- **Snow:** A little snow shouldn't be enough to keep you off your feet, at least not on well-plowed paths and streets, but consider slowing your pace and watch for slick spots. If necessary, you can attach traction devices, like Yaktrax, to your shoes for extra confidence.
- **Ice:** As with driving, the most challenging conditions often come after snow has melted and then frozen over again. If the roads and paths are too icy, it might be best to head inside and—sigh—hop on the dreaded treadmill. Nothing ruins a good run like a fractured elbow.

Provided by Rush University Medical Center

Citation: Tips to embrace the outdoors and enjoy running in cold weather (2016, December 28) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-12-embrace-outdoors-cold-weather.html>

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