



The In's & Out's of Cold Weather Running

By Diane Wood

We have all been there before. Those days we crawl out of bed listening to the wind howling as if it is telling us to stay under our cozy comforters. We look outside to find a fresh layer of snow spread over the ground, steam on the windows from the warmth that surrounds us. We think to ourselves, "Do I have to go run today?" For all but the most committed, weather has a way of interfering with exercise activities. This is evident each year as I watch participation in club weekly runs decline when the chilly winds start to blow, similar to bears' pattern of hibernating in the winter.

Cold, bitter temperatures combined with less daylight hours can make it hard to continue running outdoors through the winter months. Cold temperatures are no reason to halt your outdoor running routine! It simply requires a little more thought before venturing out the door.

Why succumb to the cold?

Cold weather exercise can be tough, but there are benefits that go beyond just getting your miles in.

- ❖ The body generates heat during heavy exertion, so running in the winter cold can be less difficult or dangerous than running in hot weather.
- ❖ Any type of outdoor activity in the winter frees you from being cooped up indoors.
- ❖ May strengthen your immune system if done on a regular basis.
- ❖ Burns extra calories needed to regulate body temperature and trudge through snow.
- ❖ Studies show that cold tends to raise one's resting metabolic rate.
- ❖ Studies show that cold environments stimulate metabolism of fat, therefore improving body composition.
- ❖ Winter running stresses agility because of the unpredictability of the surfaces, which increases your body's awareness and eye-foot coordination.

Convinced? Here is everything you will need to know to continue running outdoors and stay safe this winter when Mother Nature kicks it up a bit.

COLD WEATHER ATTIRE

Dressing properly for conditions is crucial for any runner's safety and comfort. The challenge in dressing for winter weather is not only to keep the winter chill and wetness out, but to handle the heat and moisture your body produces.

- ❖ Avoid Overdressing- Overdressing leads to excessive sweating which could result in getting cold during the run, especially if the wind is against you in later parts of your run. Traditional advice is to dress like it is 20 degrees warmer outside. The general rule of thumb is that you should be slightly cold before you start.
- ❖ Pay attention to the fabrics you are wearing- Cotton should be avoided due to its moisture holding ability. Aim for materials that wick moisture away from the skin so that you stay dry.
- ❖ Dress in Layers- Layering will go a long way to help you stay warm. It allows you to shed clothes as you generate heat and become warmer. Each layer should be a moisture wicking fabric for best results.
- ❖ Protect head and hands- A large percentage of body heat can be lost through the head. Covering your head, ears and hands can protect you from the elements such as wind. Again, use moisture wicking fabrics, which may be layered as well.
- ❖ Don't forget about feet- Wicking socks that don't hold moisture are a plus because they will keep feet drier and are less heavy than cotton socks. Since most shoes are designed to perform best in moderate temperatures, consider investing in shoes to handle elements of cold, wet and slippery surfaces better.

30 to 40% of heat from the body is lost through the head and neck.

PRECAUTIONS/SAFETY HAZARDS

It is important to make some changes to your exercise routine during the cold winter months to ensure your well being and safety. Most of us are aware that moderately cold temperatures enhance performance. Severely cold temperatures can adversely affect our performance though, and prolonged exposure to the cold can be harmful if the proper precautions are not taken.

Hypothermia & Frost Bite

Wind chill combined with wetness increases the risk of both hypothermia and frost bite. Both are rare and are avoidable with proper dress and some preplanning. Wet clothes conduct heat away from the body, accelerating the loss of body heat. Dress in thin moisture-wicking fabrics. On windy days wear an outer layer that protects you from the wind. Head into the wind during the beginning of your run and have the wind at your back when you are sweaty and fatigued. Keep your runs short on extremely cold and windy days and run in areas that provide protection from the wind.

Dehydration

Failing to drink enough fluids is a major problem among winter athletes. Cold blunts the thirst mechanism so you feel less thirsty despite significant sweat loss, especially if you overdress. In addition, athletes need to consume fluids to replace the water that is lost merely through breathing in cold dry air. Drinking during runs can reduce or eliminate your chances of dehydration, which impairs the body's ability to regulate internal temperatures.

Bronchial Problems

Breathing in cold air can aggravate bronchial problems in some people. Try wearing a scarf or handkerchief over your nose and mouth to provide some protection from the cold. In addition, drink plenty of fluids so that your throat and mouth don't dry out.

Poor Traction & Visibility

For both runners and motorists, winter brings shorter days and poor visibility, combined with slippery and sometimes icy pavements. To improve traction, choose to run on snow instead of over icy roads and sidewalks. Shorten your running stride. Run slower than you would in fair conditions. Be aware of your path and where you are going. Invest in trail shoes or another traction option like ice cleats. To improve your visibility, avoid running in the dark, especially in bad weather, when possible. Wear reflective gear. Wear light-colored clothing if it's dark and wear bright colors if it is snowy.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

- ❖ Eat before and during long runs. Your body needs fuel to regulate its core temperature.
- ❖ On extremely cold days, try to cover as much bare skin as possible. A face mask or layer of Vaseline are good means of protecting the face, eyes, and lips.
- ❖ Apply sunscreen. Sunburn is still possible in the winter because the snow reflects the sun's rays.
- ❖ Inform someone that you are going outside and how long you will be out.
- ❖ Run in a group or with a partner. This will ensure your safety being with friends in your run.
- ❖ Warm up prior to going outdoors or start off slowly to allow cold stiff muscles to loosen up.
- ❖ Get out of damp cloths as soon as possible.

So dress warmly, run with friends, force yourself to get out the door, and chances are you will find that winter running isn't so bad. Remember, although it can seem pretty cold at times, if you dress for the occasion, you will warm up pretty quickly once you start moving. The hardest part is just getting out the door.

If you have any questions or topics in which you would like to find out more about, please contact me at: dwood5555@gmail.com. Stay tuned for the next bimonthly Just So You Know article.

Last time I checked, I have a degree in Business. I am just an avid runner who loves to read. Most of my material comes from online resources, books, and of course, my own experiences. Enjoy!

CLOTHING GUIDE

40 to 60 degrees: A single layer of clothing is probably adequate (a singlet, short sleeved or long sleeved shirt) Shorts or lightweight tights.

25 to 40 degrees: At least two layers of clothing may be helpful. Shirts should be long-sleeved and skin tight to allow it to act as another layer of skin, trapping heat in so you stay warm. A wind-breaking jacket may also be worn. Tights should be light to moderate weight.

24 degrees and below: Three layers in this bone chilling weather may be helpful. This final layer should be a shell which is wind and water resistant. Preferably a fabric that breathes and allows moisture to escape is best.

Your body generates about 10% more heat after eating than when you have an empty stomach merely because of the energy that it releases during digestion.