

# Running in winter/cold

**When the temperature outside drops and it gets dark earlier, lacing up your running shoes might be the last thing you feel like doing.**

But don't let the winter weather stop you from being physically active and keeping fit. Try the following tips to help you stay safe and motivated when you're running in colder weather.

## Dress for the cold

According to Jackie Newton, endurance coach, ex-international marathon runner and online editor of [runbritain](#): "The most important thing is to dress sensibly by wearing layers – a bit like an onion."

The base layer could be a lightweight top, ideally made from a technical running fabric. "Cotton holds onto sweat, so stays wet," says Jackie. "A technical top will draw sweat away, keeping you dry. They're not expensive – you can pick one up for under £15."

The next layer will depend on the weather. It could be a lightweight fleece or, if it's windy or raining, a light waterproof jacket. If you get too hot, you can take it off and tie it around your waist.

A pair of leggings or running tights underneath a pair of shorts, or some tracksuit bottoms will keep your legs warm. And a pair of gloves and a hat or fleece headband are a good idea in cold weather to stop you losing heat from your head and hands. "It's important to wear clothes that aren't too heavy," says Jackie. "If your clothes weigh you down, running will be much harder. You'll get out of breath quicker, and that can be really off-putting for a beginner."

## Stay safe – be seen

If you go running before or after work during the winter, it's likely you'll be running in the dark.

When running after dark, it's essential that you're visible to other people, particularly motorists. Your clothes should be reflective or a bright, light colour, such as white or fluorescent yellow. Don't wear dark clothes as drivers may not see you.

Most good running brands make clothes that feature reflective strips.

A fluorescent bib that can be worn over your running clothes is also perfect for running after dark. This is why we provide the fluorescent vests at SSWC and insist you wear them. "You can buy one for less than £10," says Jackie. "I keep mine hanging on the banister next to the front door to remind me to put it on when I go out."

Stick to well-lit areas and avoid running anywhere you don't feel completely safe.

If the weather is particularly bad and the pavement is icy, it's best not to run outside at all. "Even the best runners don't go out if the conditions are too bad," says Jackie. If you have access to a gym, you could run on the treadmill or do another activity, such as swimming or a session on an exercise bike.

## Warm up and cool down

A good warm-up is essential to avoid injury, but it's particularly important in winter when it can take a little longer for your body to warm up.

Start slowly with some very gentle running or even walking. "One top athlete I used to train with always began with walking," says Jackie. "'What's the rush?' he used to say."

Gradually increase your pace until, after around 10 minutes, you get to the pace you're going to maintain for most of the run.

"Don't stop after your warm-up to stretch," says Jackie. "Your body will cool down again and you'll have wasted the time you spent warming it up." If you want to stretch before you start running, you could do some walking lunges or high knee skips.

To cool down, carry on running at an easier pace or walk for five to ten minutes. This will help your body recover after your run. But don't stop and stretch outside or you could get too cold. Do some stretches indoors instead.

## If you have a cold

Colds are more common in winter, but you don't necessarily have to stop running if you're feeling under the weather. According to Dr Keith Hopcroft, a GP from Basildon in Essex, use common sense and listen to your body.

"If your symptoms are not severe and you generally feel OK, then you can go running. If you feel absolutely rotten, then it's best not to go."

However, it's important not to run if you have a fever. A fever is when your body's temperature is 38°C (100.4°F) or above and is rarely a symptom of a cold. "If you run with a fever," says Dr Hopcroft, "it'll make you feel worse. In very rare cases, running with a fever can lead to the virus affecting your heart, which can be dangerous."

If you have asthma, take extra care when running in winter as cold air can trigger symptoms. Dr Hopcroft recommends using your inhaler before you go running and taking it with you when you run. If you are not at all sure please ask tell a SSWC coach and ask for advice.

## Staying motivated

A good way to avoid getting bored is to vary your route. Even running the same route in the opposite direction will add variety to your run. Check out the SSWC website for details on all the routes we run

Having a realistic goal to gradually work towards is also a great motivator. There are plenty of plans on the website for beginners to get you through 5 or 10 K or even a half marathon. You could enter yourself into a 5K race in 12 weeks' time, for example, or simply aim to run non-stop for 20 minutes.

According to Jackie, getting out of the front door is the hardest thing about running in winter. "Once you start running, it's much easier. And just think about how much satisfaction you'll get when you finish your run."