

Layer gear for running outdoors in winter

Mark Higginbotham

The Commercial Appeal Memphis, TN

January 10, 2007

Many walkers and runners move indoors when the north winds howl. The treadmill, mall or indoor tracks provide refuge from cold weather, but they can get boring.

Consider more fresh air outings this winter. It's easier to keep walking or running outdoors than you may think.

The trick is to dress for how you are going to feel 15 minutes into your workout.

In other words, dress as though it is 20 degrees warmer outside than it really is. You should feel a little chilly when you step outside, but your body heat will soon warm you.

Cover your head and extremities - keep ears, hands and toes adequately protected.

Wearing layers of high-tech synthetic fibers, which wick moisture away from the skin, will keep you dry and warm. On the coldest days, wear an inner wicking layer, an insulating middle layer and an outer windbreaker layer.

Wear wind pants or tights to keep your legs warm. As you warm up, remove layers before you start sweating.

Adjust for heat buildup by removing your hat first, then your gloves. Lastly -- unzip or remove your outer layer and tie it around your waist. If you start getting cold, reverse this order to stay warm.

When braving freezing temps accompanied by a high wind-chill factor, prevent frostbite by staying dry and keeping all skin covered. Apply Vaseline to protect your face.

Other tips: Warm up indoors first. Run in the sun. Take wet clothing off immediately after running and change into dry clothes to prevent hypothermia.

Why not go outside and play? You will not freeze your lungs and die! Embrace the cold, fresh air, and you will adapt to lower temps and feel exhilarated all winter long.

Understanding hypothermia

If you're adequately dressed, you won't have to worry about cold weather-related illness. But it is good to know the symptoms and the remedies.

Hypothermia, low body temperature - 96 degrees or lower - can be fatal if left untreated.

The air temperature does not have to be below freezing for someone to get hypothermia. Dehydration makes you more prone to hypothermia.

Symptoms: Shivering, numbness, lethargy, slow pulse and a glassy stare or decrease in alertness. In severe cases the muscles can become rigid and the victim may lose consciousness.

Remedies: Keep moving to generate heat. Get to a warm place. Remove wet clothing and wrap yourself in blankets, or put on dry clothes. Apply heat pads or other heat sources to the body. Drink warm liquids. Avoid alcoholic beverages, which will promote more heat and fluid loss.