



Cold Weather Running/Walking

Damien Howell

RRCA Sports Medicine Committee

The onset of winter needn't bring a seasonal halt to a runner's or walker's enthusiasm or routines. Outdoor exercise in the winter can be a pleasurable experience. The major risk posed by running or walking in subfreezing air is frostbite and minor irritations to the respiratory tract. With some minor precautions these risks can be eliminated.

LAYERS - Wear clothing in layers so that warm air can be trapped between the layers. Depending on the weather conditions, 2 to 4 layers on the trunk and 1 to 2 layers on the legs are appropriate. It is helpful if the outer layers have vents and zippers to allow excess heat to escape as you become warm. On windy days the outer layer should be of wind resistant material.

WICKING MATERIALS - Clothing made of material which carries the sweat away from the body is best, like wool, silk, or "space age" synthetics like polypropylene or polyester. Avoid cotton as it tends to hold the sweat.

HAT & GLOVES are crucial as these regions of the body have a substantial role in the regulation of body temperature. Mittens tend to be warmer than gloves. On very cold days mittens worn over gloves are very effective. Stocking caps or ski masks are desirable. On very windy days goggles or eye glasses can provide additional protection.

BE SEEN - The outer layer should be light colored and have reflective material if you are exercising during darker hours. Reflective material works only if there is a light source. Blaze orange becomes poorly visible brown at night. Light colored material is visible even without a strong light source. During snowy days dark colors provide visible contrast and attract solar energy.

IDENTIFICATION - Pin to your clothes or shoes emergency identification, preferably of a waterproof material. Let someone know where you are going to run/walk and when you expect to return. Do not run or walk with headphones.

WIND DIRECTION - Plan your run or walk so that you head into the wind during the beginning portions and with the wind behind you in the latter portions. Otherwise, built-up sweat may cause you to become too cold when you turn into the wind. Be alert when running or walking in snowy, icy conditions particularly near vehicular traffic.

DON'T OVERDRESS - Avoid overdressing. Feel a bit underdressed and chilly as you start, knowing that later as you run or walk in your layered environment the temperature will rise about 20 degrees.

THIS ARTICLE IS ADAPTED FROM THE ROAD RUNNERS CLUB OF AMERICA