

# GRAND RAPIDS RUNNING CLUB MENTOR PROGRAM

## How to Dress for Cold Weather Running

Dressing for cold weather running can be a challenge. If you dress so that you are warm at the start of your run, you may get overheated. Dress as if it is 20 degrees warmer than the actual temperature. You will be a bit cold when you start running, but as you run, you will generate a lot of body heat that will warm you up.

When running in cold weather, always remember one word - **LAYERS**. Layers of clothing will keep you warm by trapping heat against your body. As you generate heat during your run, remove layers to avoid overheating.

**Upper Body:** Depending on the weather conditions, you should dress in two or three layers:

- **Layer 1 - Wicking Base Layer.** The purpose of the first layer, closest to your body, is to wick moisture away from your skin and allow it to evaporate. A good choice is a microfiber fabric, such as Thinsulate, The1max, Coolmax, polypropylene, capilene, and silk. Avoid wearing cotton, which doesn't wick moisture, has very little insulating ability, and will leave you wet and cold. A long sleeve shirt with a high neck and a zipper allows you to adjust for temperature by unzipping and rolling up sleeves.
- **Layer 2 - Insulating Layer.** Your second or middle layer, which is needed for very cold weather, should insulate your body and keep you warm. It should be made from an insulating material such as fleece, wool, or down. It should also be able to absorb a small amount of moisture so that it can assist your first layer in keeping your skin dry and warm. This layer creates a bubble of warm air around us.
- **Layer 3 - Wind & Waterproof Outer Layer.** Your third or outside layer is there to break the wind and keep rain or snow away from your insulating and wicking layers. The material should also be breathable to allow heat and moisture to escape, in order to prevent overheating and chilling. Some examples are Gore-tex, nylon, and supplex. This shell can be easily removed and tied around your waist if you get too warm.

**Head and Neck:** On cold days, you can lose 40% of your body heat from your head. Wearing a hat will help prevent heat loss so your circulatory system will have more heat to distribute to the rest of your body. You also want to protect your skin from the cold and wind to prevent frostbite and chapping. Here's what you'll need for your head and neck:

- **Thermal Hat:** A fleece or wool hat is perfect for keeping your head warm during winter runs. You can easily tuck it into your pants or coat pocket if you feel like you're starting to overheat.
- **Neck Gaiter:** Often worn by skiers, a neck gaiter can be extremely valuable on a frigid, windy day to protect your neck and face. You can pull it up over your mouth to warm the air you're breathing in, which is especially helpful when you first start your run.
- **Balaclava:** Also known as a ski mask, a balaclava is a type of headgear that covers your whole head, exposing only your face or part of it, and sometimes only your eyes. They're usually made of fleece or wool and are only necessary if the temperature or wind chill is below 10 degrees F.
- **Chapstick/Vaseline:** Protect your lips from chapping with some Chapstick or Vaseline. You can also use the Vaseline on your nose, cheeks, or chin to prevent windburn and chapping.

**Hands:** Gloves/Mittens: As much as 30% of your body heat escapes through your hands and feet, so it's important to cover your hands. On mild days, wear gloves that wick away moisture. When it's extremely cold, mittens are a better choice because your fingers will share their body heat. You may also want to try "hand warmers"---- disposable heat packets. Two brands are Grabber and Little Hotties. These companies also produce toe/foot warmers.

**Legs:** A runner's legs do not need as many layers as the rest of the body because legs generate a lot of heat. Many runners wear one layer of tights in the winter. However, in very cold temperatures, consider two layers:

- **Layer 1** - A wicking layer of underwear: Thermal underwear or running tights made of Thermion, Thinsulate, Thermax, Coolmax, polypropylene, and/or silk is a great wicking layer. Men need to be especially careful in freezing weather to keep this layer warm. As strange as it may seem, stuffing a wool sock down the front of your thermals can be a man's best friend. In cool weather, this layer can be worn alone (in the form of running tights). Many women runners wear "Cudd! Duds Activewear" for a base layer. Cudd! Duds also carries a line of base layer apparel for men called "ClimateSmai1."
- **Layer 2** -- Wind- & Waterproof layer: A good track pant can work as a wind- and waterproof layer. Pants for camping or snowboarding may also work.

### Shoes and Socks

- **Socks:** There are many socks for running or hiking that can keep your feet warm and dry. Look for wool socks for extra warmth and wicking (i.e., SmartWool or Feetures brands), and/or materials like CoolMax and Thorlo. Avoid cotton socks that don't wick away moisture.
- **Shoes:** Your feet stay fairly warm, as long as you keep them moving and dry. Try to avoid puddles and slushy snow. Look for a running shoe with as little mesh as possible, since that's where the water will seep through to your feet. Trail running shoes are an option in the winter, because they are somewhat waterproof, have a deeper tread than normal running shoes, and will give you a little more traction in the snow.
- **Ice Cleats:** There are different types of traction systems available for running on very snowy and icy roads, including Yaktrax, Petz, Spiky Plus, Stablicers, or Icespikes. They can be found at most running or gear stores or ordered online.

### Safety:

Just as important as dressing appropriately for running in winter weather is paying close attention to your personal safety. When you are running on snowy and icy roads, use extreme caution.

- Slow your pace. Take shorter steps on icy roads.
- Be more attentive to road conditions by putting away headphones or iPods to avoid distraction!
- Run short loops close to home.
- When possible, run with a friend. If you do run alone, tell someone the route you are taking and when you expect to return.
- Wear reflective gear and some type of safety lights if running in the dark. For maximum visibility, check out the LED Light Vest at [www.ledlightvest.com](http://www.ledlightvest.com).
- Always carry some form of identification, such as a Road ID or a driver's license (year-round!).
- Stay hydrated. If using hydration belts, wear them under your coat in extremely cold temperatures to keep liquid in the bottles from freezing.
- On long runs, carry some nutrition (energy gels or bars) to keep your energy level up.
- Consider carrying some cash if there are places to purchase food or drink along your route.
- When the winter conditions are too hazardous and you're concerned about your health or safety--stay inside and use a treadmill or track.

**Plan for comfort following your run in cold weather**--Have an extra set of dry clothes and shoes in the car to change into following your run. Some people keep a towel or blanket in the car as well. A thermos with hot coffee, tea, or cocoa would be a good idea, too!

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