

The Weather Can Be Delightful, not Frightful

Running in the cold offers many challenges, including ice, snow, windchill and, here in Michigan, diminished daylight and sunshine. But don't let the change in seasons stop you from running. As you head out into the winter wonderland, here are a few tips to keep you safe and successful.

One of the most important considerations is clothing. You want to make sure you dress appropriately for the temperature and the elements. As a rule of thumb, while you are running the temperature around you will feel 15-20 degrees higher than the actual temperature. For example, if the outside temperature is 25 degrees, it will seem to be about 40-45 degrees during your run. Therefore, do not overdress. You may start your run feeling chilled, but you will warm up quickly.

Some runners begin their warm up indoors with jumping jacks, time on a treadmill or stationary bike or other aerobic or cardio activities. When you head outside, wear light layers that you can remove as you start to get warm. Do not overdress, as this can weigh you down and force you to work harder than necessary. Moisture-wicking clothes will absorb the sweat so you don't get chilled. You will also lose heat through your head, so be sure to wear a hat to help maintain a consistent body temperature.

Frostbite can be a major concern in cold weather. It is painful and can damage your skin, so protecting against it is important. Vulnerable areas include your ears, nose, lips, fingers and toes. Wear a head band or hat to protect your ears. As temperatures dip into the teens and below, it may be a good idea to wear a face mask. Chapstick is also a good option. To protect your fingers and toes, wearing gloves and a pair of thick running socks also are good ideas. If you do experience any pain, skin discoloration or lack of feeling in these areas, you should warm them with lukewarm water until the color and feeling returns. To prevent long-term injury or damage, it is a good idea to seek medical attention if symptoms persist.

Planning your route ahead of time and checking the forecast will help ensure a successful run. It's not a good idea to run in a freezing rain, for example, because this can lead to a slip-and-fall injury. Similarly, piles of snow or ice on your route are hazards that may hinder your run.

If you are planning on running on a slippery surface, you can purchase traction devices for your shoes to help prevent slipping and injury. Another tip is to monitor the wind direction and run into the wind during the first half of your run so that the wind is at your back on the back half of your run. This way, the wind isn't blowing in your face when you are at your sweatiest. Running during daylight hours is also safer, but if your run is at night, make sure you wear light-colored clothing and reflective gear or a light for safety.

If it's too cold or windy or slippery to run outside, you can always default to an indoor track or treadmill. You can still get your miles in and keep your training on track. I recommend putting the treadmill on a 2 percent incline because this will simulate running on pavement or a track.



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As temperatures drop, keep up the great work and stay safe. If you have any questions or have experienced an injury or lingering pain, do not hesitate to reach out to one of our sports medicine physicians at Spectrum Health Orthopedics at (616)267-8860. You can also find more information about our orthopedic program and providers on our website at <https://www.spectrumhealth.org/patient-care/orthopedics>.