



Top Tips For Safe Winter Running

By Jeff Gaudette, January 21, 2013

1. Prevent Slipping

You can purchase or make your own special shoes that are designed to grip the ice and hard packed snow without sacrificing the comfort and stability of your favorite training shoe. You can purchase a pair of Yak Trax from your favorite local running store, which clip on easily to the bottom of your shoe and work great.

If you prefer a homemade and cheaper option, however, you can make yourself a pair of "screw shoes". Here's how:

You'll need an old pair of running shoes, a bag of three-eighth-inch hex head screws, a Sharpie and a drill or screwdriver.

Put the shoes on and run a few strides while feeling for the regions of your forefoot that take most of the pressure during a stride. Pop the shoes off and mark three spots on the sole underneath those pressure points with the Sharpie. They will probably be along the ball of your foot. Make sure to center the screws on tall knobs of rubber to prevent the screws' tips from wiggling through the sole.

If you are using a screwdriver, poke a thumbtack into the sole to create a small hole to set the screw. Jamming a screw into hard rubber can be frustrating without a power tool, so be patient. The screws should go in easily if you're using a drill.

Once those three screws are in place, add one more at the front of the sole and two more at the rear of the forefoot, toward the medial side of the shoe. There is no need to add any screws under the heel because running on ice naturally forces runners up onto their toes.

Your haggard old running shoes are now the perfect pair of snow, ice and mud trainers. The only side effect of installing the screws is a clanking sound when running on pavement, but they still grip the road effectively. Just be careful around hardwood floors.

2. Find A Clear Path

Colleges and university roads are the places that clear snow the fastest. Why? Most colleges and universities have their own maintenance departments and are not dependent on the city. Also, their paths are usually made for pedestrians and there is less automobile traffic.

The next fastest paths and roads to clear up are usually maintenance roads, where plows and salt trucks have to go back and forth; they are great if you can find them.

Cemeteries and office parks can also be great places to run in the winter. On a snowy day, traffic will usually be low and the roads will often be some of the first to be plowed. You might have to run continuous loops to get your mileage in, but it beats playing in heavy traffic on icy, snow-covered roads.

Finally, run near schools (high school and elementary schools) since administrators clear roads quickly to get teachers and students safely to the classroom.

3. Exercise Caution On The Roads

Run against traffic when running on the roads (many times, sidewalks will not be clear enough to run, which may force you onto the road). Note also that if it's icy, sidewalks can be treacherous when you get to a sloped driveway entry. When you run against traffic, you can see what's coming at you, assess what the driver is doing or what they're looking at, and determine if they see you. If worse comes to worst, you can easily dive into a snow bank.

Also, remember that snow banks can get very high after a few snow storms and drivers may not be able to see you crossing the road. Pay extra attention when coming to intersections and crossing streets when drivers are taking right hand turns.

4. Stay Warm In The Wind

Run with the wind in your face on the way out and wind at your back the 2nd half of the route. If you run with the wind at your back the first half of a run, you'll get hot and sweaty, and when you turn around, the wind will get very cold.

Use a substance such as Vaseline on exposed parts of your skin, such as your face, to help protect from the cold and wind. Vaseline is naturally waterproof and quite windproof. It will help keep your face from "falling off" in bitter winds.

Merino wool socks are great to keep the feet warm and most often you can run well with them in regular running shoes even if it's very cold.

Lastly, invest in a jacket with wind-breaking features. This easy investment can go a long way in keeping your arms and upper body warm on a cold day. Usually a jacket with a single layer underneath is good for anything as cold as -10 c. However, if it's going down much below that, go for two layers under your jacket. You can always unzip your jacket if you warm up too much during your run.

5. Wear A Mask

Galen Rupp took a lot of heat from running enthusiasts when he showed up at the 2011 NYC Half Marathon wearing a mask. While many onlookers thought he might be a ninja, or worse yet a bank robber, Rupp was actually protecting himself from allergies and the cold air. The cold, dry winter air can cause bronchial spasms, which restricts air from filling the lungs. Running in a light mask can help warm-up the air before it hits your lungs. You don't want or need a beefy scarf, but a light mask can help filter the air just enough if you tend to have breathing issues, especially when you try to run hard.

6. Adjust Your Workout

If you're training for an important race, it is crucial that a snow day remains a small inconvenience, not a month long injury from slipping and sliding. It is much better to bag a workout and push it to a different day than tweaking a muscle you never knew you had in the first place. Waiting a day can sometimes be the difference between a winter of consistent and healthy training and a slew of injuries that lasts until spring.

7. Keep Your Shoes Dry

If you run in slushy or wet conditions, put newspaper in your shoes immediately after your run. The newspaper will soak up the water and help your shoes maintain their structure. Do not put shoes in the dryer, the oven or under a powerful heater — it will shrink the materials and lessen their shelf life.

8. Hydrate Like It's Summer

It may be cold and dry outside, and you might not think that you're sweating, but the truth is you lose almost as much fluid in the winter as you do in the summer. It's important that you rehydrate soon after each run and stay hydrated throughout the day.

Staying healthy and running well in the winter will help you build the foundation necessary for setting personal bests in the spring and summer racing season. Use these eight helpful tips to make your winter running safer, more enjoyable, and most importantly, more productive.