

Cold Comfort

By Anna Downing

Keep up summer's good intentions with our beginner's guide to dealing with winter's obstacles

Many runners love winter running. Quiet, empty streets; cool crisp air; a feeling of blissful solitude - not to mention the fact that maintaining a base over the winter is critical to successful spring running. But if you're a fair-weather runner, grab our troubleshooting guide to running year-round.



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I'm reluctant to run in the dark - what can I do?

Try to run in your lunch breaks. Otherwise, make sure you run in well-lit areas, wear reflective gear and be alert to your surroundings.

If lack of motivation is holding you back, try using a dawn simulator for morning runs (such as the Lumie Bodyclock, lumie.com, £59.95) - it will ease you out of sleep and make you feel refreshed. And seeing the sun rise mid-run might be all the motivation you need to do it again.

I start my run freezing cold but then get hot and sweaty, so I find it hard to know what to wear

Rule number one: never wear cotton. It retains sweat and will make you freeze. Wear layers - one to wick sweat away, another (if it's very cold) to insulate the body, and a protective jacket.

This lot should keep you warm as you start your run, but as you warm up you might feel the need to shed layers, so wear a jacket with removable sleeves and put them in your pocket; or one that folds up small and put it in a bum bag.

Another idea is to warm up thoroughly before you head out the door - try star jumps and running on the spot, or head to the gym and start your run on a treadmill.

I have a cold - can I still run?

Yes. The only symptoms you should stay tucked up in bed with are fever, chilliness, a chesty cough and muscle aches. Just take your runs easy, and you should feel better for them.

"Exercise helps to decongest the nose," says Professor Ron Eccles, director of the Common Cold Centre, Cardiff University. "It moves the white cells around in the blood, and could be more beneficial than being a couch potato."

I get a burning sensation in my chest when I run in the cold

Many runners experience this. It is caused by hard physical work in very cold air, which can trigger

narrowing of the airways. Chilling of the face or nasal cavity may also play a part.

"Think of how a splash of cold water takes your breath away, and it isn't hard to believe that there is a link between skin temperature and breathing," says Dr Alex Nieper, sports physician at Pure Sports Medicine (puresportsmed.com). "Breathe in through the nose as much as possible; it warms and moistens the air."

You could also try wearing a Buff (buffwear.co.uk), which will insulate your face and warm the air you breathe.