

5 Tips for Cold-Weather Racing

The weather is cooling down; there is no doubt about that. With the change in the weather brings a change in our race planning. Here are 5 tips for racing in cold weather from our friends at Competitor Magazine.

1. Bundle up before the start

A cold-weather race is a great excuse to get rid of the old sweats that have been sitting in a box in your basement for the better part of the last decade, or to take a trip to the local Goodwill store in order to do some shopping. Look for a well-worn long sleeve shirt, a jacket, hat and pants to wear on your way to the starting line in an effort to stay warm before the race. Wear these layers over your racing kit while you're in the corral waiting for the event to start and toss them to the side of the road or in a donation bin (many races will collect throwaway clothes and donate them to charity) a few minutes before the starter's gun sounds.

2. Be sure to layer appropriately

After shedding your temporary outer layers, it's important to take an inside-out approach to dressing yourself for a cold-weather race. Start closest to your body and work your way out from there. A good rule of thumb is to dress as if it's 10 degrees warmer than it actually is outside because once you get moving you'll warm up quite a bit. If the air temperature is above freezing and winds are calm, a lightweight short or long-sleeve t-shirt, shorts or half tights, and a lightweight hat and gloves should keep you plenty warm enough from start to finish.

3. Give yourself time to warm up

If you're running a short race such as a 5K or 10K, head out about 30-40 minutes before the start for a 15-minute warmup jog followed by a set of 4-6 faster 20-second pickups. This will help to get your blood flowing and ready your muscles for the intense effort ahead of you. Since 5Ks and 10Ks are so short, it's important to get a good warmup in before stepping to the starting line. The 10K affords you a little more time to build into race pace after setting out, but in a 5K you've got to be ready to go from the start. For a longer race such as a half marathon or marathon, going for a 5-10 minute jog about 30 minutes before the start will help you to get loose before stepping to the starting line. Once the race starts, use the first few miles as an extended warmup and gradually build into your intended race pace. After you warm up and find your rhythm, aim to finish a little faster over the final 3-6 miles to hit your goal time.

4. Don't forget to drink

Don't let the dry air of colder winter-like weather fool you. You will sweat just as much when it's cold outside as you will in warm temperatures. For longer races such as a half or full marathon, be sure to stay on top of your hydration needs in the days and hours before the race, as well as during the race itself. Although cold water or sports drink might not sound super appealing on a chilly day, be sure to stick to your hydration plan during the race and drink at regular intervals to replace lost fluids. If necessary, take a couple extra seconds to stop at an aid station and get your fluids down without spilling all over yourself.

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5. Get warm right away

Remember: Once the race gets underway and you start running, you will warm up and *almost* forget how cold it is outside. But as soon as you stop, Mother Nature won't hesitate to remind you that the weather conditions aren't exactly pleasant. Take caution after crossing the finish line of a cold race and try to get warm as quickly as possible. If they're available, take advantage of the shiny Mylar blankets that many bigger races offer in the mixed zone after you cross the finish line and wrap one around yourself until you can get back to your car or into a warm building. Plan ahead with any family or friends who might be waiting for you at the finish line by having them carry a backpack with a dry set of clothes (underwear, pants, sweatshirt and/or jacket, hat and gloves) for you to change into immediately afterward. If you're at the race alone, remember where you've stashed your dry clothes and have a plan for getting to them as quickly as possible after the race. On really cold days, sweat can start to freeze and makes you a prime target for frostbite, so plan ahead to avoid any unsafe circumstances.