

Just as there is a need to take a day off from the stress of running during a training week, and to have a week of lower volume, intensity, or frequency during a training month; there is also benefit to a running season of less stress. The winter months can be that season.

It is often thought that we become stronger and faster runners with the hard efforts of speed work, tempo runs, and other running workouts. The reality is that it is the *repair* our body does to those stressed muscles during the recovery periods that ultimately improves our strength and speed. "Recovery" is a time of lower stress on the body, but not complete rest. This may take the form of a shorter distance on the "long run", a longer recovery interval during speedwork, or less frequent runs for a week/month. The winter months provide a time for such training because the frequency of races is much less than it is during the racing season.

The winter season also provides a time to focus on a specific aspect of your running that you may have found lacking during the past running season; this might be developing speed or improving your Lactate Threshold. Professional coaches have noted that their runners do better on longer distance events in the spring because of the shorter distance running and training they did during the winter months. The winter is also a great time to focus on flexibility or cross-training with time on the bike or in the pool (no, not trying to turn you into a triathlete but these offer the ability to maintain aerobic fitness will less stress on the legs).

Training in the winter months of New England has challenges that may not be present during the regular racing season (typically March to November). With the end of Daylight Saving Time, the amount of darkness each day gets longer. For the many who train/run on roads (whether you run early or late in the day), it may be dark outside. This means there is a greater need for active lighting vs just wearing reflective items when we run. Drivers may not be expecting to see runners on the roads in December or January. Reflective gear is only good when the lights of the vehicles reflect off what you are wearing; active lighting is much better as the driver typically becomes aware of something "different" before they actually realize it's a runner. Consider using an active color that drivers do not normally see such as blue or purple, since drivers are used to seeing lights that are white, red and yellow. I remember one run on a dark morning when the lights of an on-coming car shifted to high-beams then back to low. To me, it was comforting. It meant I had been seen.

Running in the winter may present problems with proper footing. Even in the daylight, it may be hard to see ice on the road. Is there snow where you are running, or is there ice under the snow? These conditions increases the potential for unstable footing that may result in a twisted ankle/knee, a strained muscle, or worse - a fall. Consider using a product that fits over your shoes and provides short spikes, improving your footing in slippery conditions.

And once the snow arrives, the snow drifts on the side of the roads may limit your ability to run on the shoulder of the road, requiring you to be closer to the moving traffic. These same snow drifts may also hamper the ability of drivers to see you. Even with active lighting, *always run facing the traffic* and think ahead about your options should there be a need to get off the road suddenly/quickly such as jumping into a snow drift. And note, regardless of the season, if there is an emergency vehicle with lights or sirens on the same road that you're running on, "pull over" just like the cars do.

Winter running can be a lot of fun as long as you are prepared for the conditions. On a crisp morning, hearing the crunch of the snow under my shoes; and seeing the mist from my exhaled air is most enjoyable. Yes, the cold air can be hard on the throat and lungs so do consider a wearing a neck

gaiter over your mouth and nose. Also, be attentive to the wind-chill (now called "Real Feel") temperatures. There are times when it really is unsafe to run due to extreme air temperatures.

Regardless of the season, be sure someone knows your running route and when you expect to be back. Even when I was single and running, I would call my sister to let her know I was going for a run, where I would be and when I expected to be back. (My sister lives in Chicago!) Once, after I married, I went out for a short run on Farmington Ave near where I live - but I bonked. I walked myself home, arriving right at the limit of when I had told my wife "If I am not back by xx time, come looking for me". As I came in the door, she was putting on her coat and about to get in the car to come find me. *Always think safety* when you run, especially in the winter months.

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