

Do's and Don'ts of Dressing for Fall Running by Stride Longley

The cool, crisp air of a New England fall has a way of knocking seconds off miles and minutes off marathons. But for all its blessings, the fall can have a nasty bite for the uninitiated. Unprotected skin can get mighty chilly, and the overdressed masses are wont to finding new words to describe just how sweaty and dehydrated they are. So for the beginning of the trickiest season of dress, I'm here with words of wisdom to shed light in the (early) dark of Fall Running. Read on.

First and foremost, ditch the old cotton sweatshirt you've had since your high-school football days. Believe it or not, this is potentially the worst possible piece of apparel you could be wearing. Let me explain: cotton is a natural fiber long touted for its absorbent qualities. So, despite how heavy and warm that sweatshirt may be, as your body temperature rises and you begin to sweat, guess where all of that sweat ends up? Stuck to your skin. Now you're wearing a heavy, wet, sweatshirt that's stuck to your skin in cold temperatures, all of which can add up to hypothermia in a jiffy.

Step one: upgrade your wardrobe. Retire the cotton sweatshirt to lazy Sunday football watching, and get yourself some technical, synthetic wicking apparel. But with all the options, what is right to buy? Good news: you only need 3 pieces to get you through all the weather just around the corner.

The key to success in fall and winter running is the 3-layer principle. Developed in the 1970s by survival gear champions Helly-Hansen (the company exclusively worn by the cast of Discovery's *The Deadliest Catch*), and subsequently modified to suit running, the 3-layer system of dress is the universal standard for technical outdoor activity. The system is comprised, not surprisingly, of a series of three garments designed specifically to be layered on top of one another for the best results. Why three layers? Primarily, because 3 layers gives you the most flexibility in moisture management, insulation, and protection from the elements. Each layer in the trio has its purpose, and here's the breakdown:

The Baselayer: Suitably named, the baselayer acts as the layer that sits directly on top of the skin. The baselayer is a tight, athletically cut, almost always long-sleeved wicking shirt, designed to give your body the best possible moisture management. By having all of your upper body in contact with a fabric designed specifically to pull sweat away from you and toward the next layer, you stay significantly drier, and therefore your body temperature will be more evenly regulated and less likely to surrender to the cold weather.

The Midlayer: The midlayer is often a slightly looser fitting, heavier weighted shirt designed to provide warmth. It does this in two ways: first, the looser fit allows for a small pocket of air between it and the baselayer below, which itself acts as thermal barrier. Secondly, the tighter weave and heavier weight of the fabric serve to both block wind and act as a thermal layer. Many midlayers also feature a half-zip for ventilation, as the majority of the conditions in which one is running will only require a baselayer and a midlayer.

The Outer Layer or Shell: The shell is the last piece in the trio, and provides arguably the most technical features to round out the arsenal. Its purpose is to simply block the elements (wind, rain, and snow), but it also acts as the final piece in the moisture transfer puzzle, pulling all of that sweat to the outermost layer to evaporate. Shells have a host of features, including reflectivity, waterproofing, hoods, side venting, MP3 pockets, and more. Each of these features has an effect on the pricepoint, so budget accordingly. If you need a jacket that has a hood, side vents, 360-degree reflectivity, seam-sealed waterproofing, and a pocket for your iPod, the bargain basement is out.

Bottoms: As for the lower half of the body, the choices are more personal taste than physiological. The torso contains the majority of the body's vital organs, and therefore demands the best protection. Your legs can

handle a pretty serious amount of cold, and the very act of running does a great deal to promote circulation in the lower extremities. While you won't be wearing shorts in temperatures below 40 degrees, your legging selection is a matter of tights or pants. Pants are the traditional, happy-go-lucky choice for those who just want to cover their legs and get the job done, and they succeed.

Tights, on the other hand, offer a whole other realm of compression, 2, 4, and 6-way stretch characteristics, and fit choices. Tights aren't for everyone, so let your comfort level guide you. As a general rule, tighter is better with tights, but the converse is not true with pants; looser is not necessarily better. The looser the fit, the more potential there is for cold air to get in and make you even colder than you were to begin with. Both pants and tights come in a variety of weights, so let your body dictate how heavy a bottom you go with: if you sweat profusely when you run, even in cold temperatures, you probably don't need the tights that feel like a wetsuit; go for something a bit thinner. On the other hand, if you're always freezing, go with the thermal or lowest temperature rated apparel you can find.

As for figuring out how your body works, and dressing appropriately, it can take a few tries to get the formula right. Generally, you want to dress as though the outside temperature were 10-15 degrees higher than the thermometer reads; as your body heats up and reaches its peak, you want your clothing to be accommodating but not so much as to promote overheating. You can count on your body reaching its peak temperature after about 10-15 minutes of running, give or take a few, so the first few minutes can be a bit chilly, but you'll be thanking yourself when you finish your run and aren't dripping sweat.

Lastly, two often overlooked and underappreciated pieces of gear: **hat and gloves**. We've all heard the "your body loses most of its heat in cold weather through your head" schtick, and it's never more true than when you're running, sweating, and tired. Wear a hat. When the temperature commands it, wear gloves too. Both hats and gloves come in weights the same way pants do, so shop accordingly. You know, after years of having a head and hands, exactly how cold they get, so buy heavy if you need to.

To be honest, this is just barely scratching the surface of the fall/winter apparel situation. But with a bit of practice, a little experimentation, and the above advice you should be just a little bit better armed to take on the elements. Don't worry, the seasons aren't going anywhere any time soon.

-Stride