

Appropriate Winter Clothing for Runners....by Ken Friesen

With a little planning, keeping comfortable while running outside in cool weather is achievable. Maintaining body temperature at an optimal level without overheating or risking frostbite are challenges that we face with the winter weather that comes through Winnipeg.

Layering of clothing is a key defense against an unpleasant outdoor experience. There is an art to this in that each layer has a purpose. They should each fit, perform and be constructed differently. Layering will help with any activity that works the body hard enough to perspire in a cold environment such as cross-country skiing, fast walking, hockey, and running.

Remember that your old cotton t-shirt may feel comfortable to lounge around in but when you are active it absorbs all the perspiration and holds it against you.

Athletic manufactures have been developing new fabrics to make their clothing perform better, offer safety features and are comfortable while still being lightweight. Some features include: a) Reflective trim, b) hidden pockets, c) locking zippers that will not flap up and down against your neck as you run, d) flat-lock stitching on the seams that doesn't chafe against the skin, e) multiple fabrics on one garment to allow different parts of the body to breath, provide essential support and manage moisture at varying levels depending on the need and the list goes on.

Tips on choosing items to wear for each of the three main layers:

First Layer ~ this layer generally fits snug to the body and its main responsibility is to wick moisture away from the skin to the next layer. The idea is to keep the skin dry so that you don't experience the chills as perspiration cools down and evaporates. This includes all items against the body such as socks, shorts, bra tops as well as the shirt and pants.

Second Layer ~ a dual purpose layer, the objective is to transfer moisture away from the first layer and provide the insulation needed to trap some body heat to keep you at a comfortable temperature. In the spring or fall time, when temperature and the wind chill factor are minimal either of these first two layers can be worn alone as the only layer.

Outer Layer ~ needs to be breathable, keeping the wind, snow, or rain out and still allowing moisture to pass from the second layer out. A well-constructed, tightly woven fabric can do this by having pores small enough to stop rain droplets from penetrating yet allowing the smaller moisture molecules to pass through. Some garments also have an inner liner built in to add to the insulation value.

Soft-shell garments are a newer technology worn as the outer layer. These garments combine a windproof surface with an insulating inner layer. True to their name they have a soft feel and don't make noise when rubbed together the way that old style nylon or polyester shells do.

Brands such as Sugoi, Adidas, Saucony, New Balance, Brooks, Reebok and Nike have come up with new and cozy feeling high performance fabrics that will allow you to enjoy your activities at an enhanced performance level. There are a variety of names each manufacturer calls the material they use that can function properly at each layer. The most commonly used and recognized name is CoolMax.

For a great selection of technical clothing visit 'Stride Ahead – the best in running and walking' located in the Grant Park Shopping Centre. Stride Ahead carries all the brands mentioned above and is Winnipeg's only source for many unique styles.