

The right gear

As part of any fitness campaign, it is important to have the correct equipment to be able to train safely and correctly. Running is a very simple sport and, luckily, requires very little specialist kit. The most technical and most important kit that you need to buy are your running shoes. These have evolved over the past 10 years into sophisticated pieces of technology, which each manufacturer has their own version of.

Socks

These can be simple white sports socks that can be picked up from most clothing stores. However, if you get more serious about your running, it is wise to invest in a proper pair of socks that have been designed for running. They are designed to wick away moisture and sweat from the foot so that you don't slip and suffer so many blisters when running. In addition, these types of socks are designed with more padding in certain areas to aid the shoes in cushioning.

The latest socks are designed to fit the foot they are on ie left and right specific. They hug the foot better and there is no excess sock floating around in the shoe, which may cause blisters. As with most things nowadays, you get what you pay for and a £1 pair of socks won't give you as much comfort as an £8 pair.

Shorts and tights

After socks come shorts or, when it is colder, tights. Shorts should be comfortable, lightweight and have the ability to wick away sweat when you train. Most running shorts now come with a pant liner so you don't have to wear anything else with them. This is good but you should try them on first, as some of the inners can be a little restrictive if you don't get the right size. Most shorts come with elastic waistbands, and the more expensive ones come with a drawstring as well. It is worth paying a little extra to get the drawstring because you can tie the shorts to your specification, rather than simply relying on the elastic to hold them up.

Elastic-only shorts often move down a little, especially in wet conditions. Your shorts shouldn't be so tight that they cut off circulation round your waist but,

conversely, they shouldn't be so loose that they flap around all the time either. Finally, check the slit up the side, this is often quite large to allow for greater ventilation but make sure you are happy with how much leg it actually shows when you run.

When the weather gets colder it is advisable to wear tights to keep your legs warmer and thus reduce the chance of injury. Fabric technology has exploded recently with the aid of new synthetic materials and NASA technology.

This has aided running no end with high tech materials filtering down to basic running kit like tights and T-shirts. The running tights now can be custom fit ones that have been designed to hug the legs more efficiently and stop the wind and rain penetrating the leg itself. This helps in reducing injuries from cold muscles and also means that you can enjoy running when the weather is a little worse than ideal. Only diehard older runners now wear loose fitting cotton tights.

Fashionable and technologically-knowledgeable runners choose high-tech garments that help their running. Your tights should be snug fitting and comfortable. It is important to try them on before you buy because many manufacturers have different cuts to suit different styles of runner. Generally, the more expensive the tight, the more comfortable they will be. and the better at keeping you cool in summer and warm in winter.

Short and long sleeve T-shirts have also benefited, like tights, from technological advances. The mid- to top-range T-shirts all wick away sweat to keep you cooler,

Shelter

and allow a greater air circulation through the fabric.

They feel very lightweight but have the properties to keep you warm or cool depending on when and how you wear them. Running T-shirts should be reasonably tight but not figure hugging and likewise they shouldn't flap around when you run in them. It is a fine balance between well fitted and slightly baggy you should aim for. With long sleeve T-shirts, you should aim to get ones with cuffed sleeves so they stay down around your wrists.

Without cuffs, the sleeves often ride up your arms when you run, and this can be both annoying and cold.

Gloves

These should be lightweight and comfortable. Only in extreme weather will you need to wear thick running gloves and, more often than not, you will heat up enough to be okay in the normal thin type. Woollen gloves are the norm because they are cheap to buy but they don't offer the same waterproof and wind stopper capabilities of the new high-tech fabrics. Woollen gloves will be fine for most runners, but if you are venturing out into colder or more wet climates, it is worth investing in a high-tech pair. Running with cold hands can ruin the experience for you, so choose carefully when you buy, especially if it is near wintertime.

Hats

Hats are similar to gloves in that woollen ones are the norm because they are easy to get hold of and cheap. The more high-tech versions like fleece offer wind stopping capabilities and some are waterproof as well.

Peaked caps have become more fashionable recently and are favoured by younger runners. These hats offer greater protection from the rain, snow and sun but often they can get blown off in windy conditions. They don't offer the same warmth as woollen/high-tech fabrics but they are good when you need better protection from the elements. In addition, they are better for runners who wear glasses because they protect the glasses from rain or snow.

Tops

When the weather gets really cold or wet, it is advisable to run in a gillet or a long sleeve waterproof top. These offer excellent wind-stopping and rain-resistance capabilities and can keep you warm and dry throughout any run. Gillets are armless and ideal for quicker running in slightly warmer climates while the full long sleeve waterproofs are better for colder and wetter climates.

These types of tops are multi-purpose because they can be used casually as well, and the ones at the top end are very high-tech and guaranteed waterproof and windproof. Cheaper versions will be fine for most running conditions but they sacrifice certain aspects like being 100 per cent waterproof or windproof.

Being prepared for cooler conditions enables you to stay warm, dry and enjoy the run more. In warmer climates, the new fabrics and technologies enable you to train harder by staying cooler and wicking away sweat and moisture from the body. Both of these mean you can no longer blame the weather for not training and you can now get and stay fitter all year round in comfort and style.

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