

[ COACH CULPEPPER ]

## OPTIMAL WINTER RUNNING

How to get the most out of your winter training.

BY ALAN CULPEPPER

**MOST RUNNERS THINK** of winter as a season to “just get through” versus a time of year that can be inspirational or motivating. There are certainly some athletes who like running in the winter and find satisfaction in toughing out the harsh conditions. I can appreciate this aspect and enjoy the solitude of a run in the snow, but I’m more of the “just get through it” type of mindset.

Whatever your stance, there are ways to get the most out of your time and effort, allowing you to optimize your winter training. Living and training in Boulder, Colo., I’ve endured my fair share of tough conditions, albeit nothing like other parts of the country. Over the years I’ve learned to be creative and use winter as a time to continue training effectively so I can come through fitter, healthier and ready for the spring racing season.

### DON'T FIGHT IT

» Runners usually don't want to alter their training schedule in any way. Most of us have a window of time that we have set aside for our workouts, as well as a routine that allows it to fit into our daily lives. Winter requires adaptability, depending on the conditions. Adjusting your schedule to account for winter weather will allow for larger returns over the entirety of the season. Sure, there are times when you will still get out there and get a run in even if it involves running in the rain, snow or a cold wind. But with some compromise, you can keep your fitness progressing and stay fresher both physically and mentally. Change the time of day you run to take advantage of the best window weather-wise and/or where you run to ensure you have safe footing or blockage from the wind. Sometimes changing your workout from a fast interval session to a more controlled fartlek or tempo run can be the answer. Be nimble when it comes to where and when you run and the types of workouts you do during the winter.



Choosing where you run can be as important as how you run in the winter.

### GOOD FOOTING IS KEY

» Another great way to ensure you optimize your winter training is through finding the best footing possible. Running on packed or slippery snow, uneven, frozen ground or even gravel left over on the roads can lead to injuries. Finding dry and safe footing should be your first thought if you have a long run or harder workout planned. Continually running on poor footing can lead to compensation, overworking one muscle group or pelvic alignment issues that can cause a multitude of problems. You are better off waiting until later in the day or driving a bit farther out of your way to get on safe ground as this will also allow for a more productive and safe workout.

### GO INSIDE

» Runners have different feelings about treadmills; some will jump on one a couple times a week without pause, while others would rather skip their run altogether. Finding a healthy balance between indoor and outdoor running is critical to thriving during the winter. Treadmills are not better than the real thing, but when the weather is not cooperating or footing is poor, a treadmill workout can be the best option. We get some pretty big snowstorms in Boulder, and every winter I do a handful of workouts on the treadmill. Without question I get more physical benefits from those indoor treadmill sessions than if I were slipping around outside. Mentally, I find that I also benefit from not having to brave the elements and beating myself down emotionally. I actually like speed workouts better on a treadmill than an easy run on them. Alternating between faster and slower paces makes the time pass quicker and keeps your mind occupied. It can be a love-hate dynamic, but coming to terms with having to run inside on occasion can make a big difference over the winter months.



» Running coach and two-time U.S. Olympian **ALAN CULPEPPER** is a vice president and race director for the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon Series. For more of his coaching insights, go to [competitor.com/culpepper](http://competitor.com/culpepper).