



GEAR THROUGH THE YEAR By Bob Klein

LIVING IN THE UPPER MIDWEST, we experience all four seasons and need to change our gear and clothing to accommodate the weather. Each season presents a set of unique challenges for all athletes, especially runners.

Luckily, today's apparel is the most technologically advanced that it has ever been. Wet, uncomfortable cotton shirts just don't cut it anymore. Here are my recommendations for the gear that will keep you running throughout the year:

SPRING

Spring in Chicago brings the hope of warm, sunny days ahead. Unfortunately, we still need to trudge through some winter weather before we start working on our tans. In spring, layers are important, although fewer are needed than during winter. Consider using base layers of both short and long-sleeved tees. This combination can trap warmth at your core, but leave your arms free to move. For some runners, a vest is the preferred piece of clothing for temperature regulation. A jacket with zip-off sleeves that can be stored in a pocket, like Sugoi's Versa Jacket, can give you the best of both worlds.

For legs, a light run pant or capri can keep your thighs warm and may be a better alternative to traditional running shorts because you won't have to expose your knees and legs to the changing temperatures.

Don't forget to start every outfit off with some moisture-wicking underwear.

SUMMER

On hot days, light and airy tops and shorts are the way to go. Lighter colors are best—they will reflect more of the sun. Nike Dri-Fit mesh t-shirts have always been one of the best tops for warm summer days, but Sugoi Technifine t-shirts also work incredibly well at keeping you cool and dry.

Don't forget a hat, sunglasses and sun block for protection. Use a water carrier for runs of more than an hour or stash fluid along your route if you don't want to carry it. Keep anti-chafe products handy and use them before a run to protect potential hot spots from wet clothing. Paper tape is also a good alternative for areas that get a lot of rubbing. The tape will stay put during your run, but peel off easily afterwards. Finally, moisture wicking synthetic socks are a must in warm weather. Don't risk blistering in cotton.

FALL

Fall is a great time to run. The humidity moves out, and things begin to cool off. But once the temperature falls below 40 degrees, it's time to start thinking about cool-weather protection. Fall clothing needs are not too different from what we

need for spring. Bring out the tech long-sleeve tees because moisture movement remains important. You also need to be thinking about trapping some of your body heat. One way to do this, is to protect yourself from the wind with a vest, light jacket or pullover. Look for something from Smartwool or the North Face Vaporwik to give you some warmth without being too warm.

Many runners' thoughts are on upcoming marathons at this time of year. Your training shoes are probably worn, so plan to replace them at least four weeks prior to your race.

WINTER

Winter is the most important time to have a wide selection of technical apparel at hand. A good layering system is necessary to regulate your body temperature. Use pieces that stay close to your body so that they will move moisture quickly. The tighter the base layer fits, the better it will move moisture. You can find a lot of good choices from Smartwool, North Face, Sugoi, Nike Brooks, Asics and Mizuno.

Trap body heat by choosing mid-layers that have a thermal component, like Sugoi's Midzero fabric, Asics' Thermopolis or the Mizuno Breath-Thermo that heats up when it gets wet. Top them off with an outer layer to protect you from wind and wet conditions. Asics Storm Shelter jackets and Sugoi's Firewall jackets are both good choices to keep you cozy.

Tights or pants in technical fabrics are a necessity. They preserve freedom of movement by using the best fabrics. Often they have features like articulated knees to make your run more comfortable. These pants have a wind-blocking panel of fabric, but a wind pant or a shell pant with some water resistance is probably a good addition.

Cover your fingers with gloves or mittens or both. Start with a wicking base layer and top that with a wind-proof or waterproof mitten. Ear protection is also critical. Use a stretchy headband or a pair of ear warmers like the ones by 180's, they keep your ears covered, but allow you to hear. On a really cold day, a hat will help keep you warm and a facemask will keep your nose protected.

Running throughout the year has its challenges, but it also has great rewards. Using the right clothing helps make reaping those rewards just a little easier.

Bob Klein owns three Runner's Edge stores (Chicago, Wilmette and Libertyville) and is an expert in performance clothing and gear.