

Running: Chilling Motivation

Visualization can be an effective motivational tool to help get you out the door. Spend some time the night before visualizing yourself on a great run.

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This time of year is always the toughest for us runners, at least those -- like me -- who don't exactly cherish the thought of cold, wet days. Not everyone can have the self-discipline of a drill sergeant, and I confess to having the backbone of a jellyfish when the mercury dips.

Through the years, I've found that motivation is a curious thing. It's often elusive, but it's also responsive to the most unusual catalysts. You may be motivated to run for fear of losing what you've gained, such as your aerobic capacity, or gaining something you've lost, such as that spare tire. Alternately, you may be fired up at the thought of achieving something, such as beating your arch rival in that spring marathon.



Motivation is a personal thing. Everyone is hard-wired differently, based on the chopped salad of experiences that gets thrown into the Cuisinart of life. What works well for you may not work for another, and vice versa. Here are a few tricks to try.

Warm rewards: If it's cold, wet and just plain miserable outside, entice yourself with a warm, cozy reward, such as some time in front of the fireplace, a cup of hot cocoa or some reading time with your favorite blanket. Sometimes it's the promise of simple pleasures that can motivate you to get out of your comfort zone and hit the road.

Hit the stores: Everybody knows that the key to staying comfortable during cold weather is layering. If you don't have the right gear for this time of the year--such as a polypropylene base layer and moisture wicking layers, as well as a running jacket with good ventilation--running through the winter can be unbearable. Sometimes just knowing you have the right gear gives you the self-assurance that you're prepared for the elements. This can go a long way toward getting you out there.

Make a list: Think about all the benefits that running gives you in order to focus on training outside through the winter. Try to make the benefits on the list as specific and descriptive as possible. Also, make the list as long as possible--shoot for 25 benefits. Post the list somewhere you will always see it, and continue to add to it in the coming months. Check the list before and after each run to keep you fired up.

Bribe yourself: OK, sometimes you have to resort to sheer greediness to get yourself to do something. Is there some item you've been eyeing in a catalog or on your favorite online shopping site? Jonesing for a new Gore-Tex jacket or a trip to

Vegas ? Set a challenge for yourself, such as running outside at least four times per week for the next month, and reward yourself once you've reached your target.

Set goals: Nothing will get you outside like the need to train for an upcoming event. If you pay up for a spring marathon, you'll find it much easier to get your miles in. But the goals don't have to be so grand. There are plenty of local races during the winter. Signing up for a few of those will give you smaller, more frequent goals.

Visualize: The use of mental imagery as a sports performance tool is well established, but imagery can be an effective motivational tool to simply get that winter morning run going. Spend some time during the day (or, if you run in the mornings, the night before) visualizing yourself running outside like the true warrior you are.

Remember, everybody is hard-wired differently, so visualize in the way that fits with your "trigger," whatever that may be. It could be focus on a visual image of your face, the sound of your running shoe striking the snowy pavement, or the feeling of sweat running down your face as the cool air swirls around you.

While some of these motivational techniques may seem unusual, there's nothing strange about finding the right strategy to keep you fit and running throughout the winter. Like everything in life, it takes trial and error, so don't be dismayed if a certain strategy doesn't pan out for you. If you're persistent and creative about motivating yourself, you will succeed in conquering those winter running demons.