

Season's fleeting

How to work your training into the busiest time of year

Tis the season for your best intentions to slowly unravel, one by one. Missing the odd run won't affect your training too much, but the cumulative effect of many days off could be bad news, says personal trainer Craig O'Toole (cotpt.com). "Within a two- to four-week break, your VO₂ max goes down by four to 10 per cent, while lactate threshold, aerobic enzyme activity and muscle glycogen levels all decrease," says O'Toole.

"A break might also have an impact on your confidence," points out coach Liz Fulford (fitnesstrainingspecialists.co.uk). Fortunately, you don't need to log mega-mileage to stay on top over Christmas. Here's how to keep things ticking over until life gets back to normal.



SNOW EXCUSE
Don't stop running just because it's Christmas



STAY SHARP

An abbreviated training schedule can keep you in shape – as long as your workout intensity remains high. "Two high intensity sessions per week are the absolute minimum," says O'Toole. Fulford adds, "These sessions could be threshold runs of two or three miles, fartleks or hill sprints, all of which should only take around half an hour."

When time is very short, O'Toole recommends short, sharp intervals of all-out effort, as developed by Dr Izumi

Tabata, a former researcher at Japan's National Institute of Fitness and Sports. Try eight sprints of 20 seconds with 10 seconds' recovery in between. With a warm-up and cool-down, you can squeeze quality anaerobic work into less than quarter of an hour. One study in *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* found that subjects following the Tabata method had an average increase in VO₂ max of 7ml/kg/min and an increase in anaerobic power of 28 per cent after six weeks.



GO LONG

Supplement these two high intensity workouts with an endurance session to maintain your base fitness and keep you used to being on your feet (see Three-Day Fitness Plan, below). If you usually log 40-50 miles a week, do 50 per cent of your previous longest run; otherwise, do three quarters of the length of your typical long run.

When you get back into your normal routine, "don't start right back at the level

you were when you stopped", says Fulford. "You'll need to gradually build up your miles again to avoid injury."



KEEP SANE

In between decorating the Christmas tree, wrapping the gifts and trying not to overcook the turkey, you might feel a bit selfish sneaking out for a run. But don't let guilt keep you off the roads. "When families are together for a long, intense period of time, it can be very beneficial to escape," says Fulford. "It's a coping strategy."

If your family gives you grief, remind them that running leaves you happier and calmer. If, on the other hand, you're blessed with understanding relatives, you might be able to tempt them out for a group jog. You could even sign up en masse for one of the Turkey Trot, Christmas Cracker or Santa Dash races that spring up at this time of year – just remember to embrace the glad tidings and run for fun rather than for a PB. **RW**

THREE-DAY FITNESS PLAN

When time is of the essence, Liz Fulford recommends you stay fit by cutting down to three workouts per week. Do these in any order, with a rest day after each.

	Day 1: Speed	Day 2: Hills	Day 3: Endurance
Workout	4 x 800m	4 x 1-mile hill repeats	5 miles or 50 minutes
Pace	First interval at 10 seconds slower than 5K race pace. Gradually increase speed until you're running 5K race pace in the final 800m.	Start at an easy effort to get a feeling for the hill. Progress to a medium-hard effort by the final repeat.	Easy, conversational.
Notes	Jog 400m in between repeats as recovery.	Jog downhill as recovery.	Add one mile every other week.