

Running in the dark

Guidance for Victoria Park Running Club (VPRC) Members (#TeamVPRC)

VPRC club events often take place at dusk or in the dark, and the low visibility of both you and your surroundings makes for a far more challenging running environment, especially on busy roads and on trails.

Cars and other pedestrians might not be able to see you, and you might struggle to see kerbs, potholes, roots, and other trip hazards.

The club asks that all members that run at VPRC events that take place in low light or dark at any time, wear clothes that are visible and use an effective running light, treating both as essential pieces of running gear.

Types of light

Broadly running lights have two purposes - to make you visible to others and to illuminate the path ahead to help you avoid trip hazards.

As ever, in running, there is a big marketplace for such devices and therefore a myriad choice of types, brands, and prices.

There are running lights that start as fashion items such as glowing tags for your shoes, arm band reflectors, and everything from head lamps to body-mounted to clip on types. There are different light sources from LED to more traditional bulbs, different power sources such as batteries or USB charged. The mountings vary widely including straps and clips and added extras such as reflective material built into the design. Some lights are purely directional such as a traditional head torch and may light your way but gives little reverse light. There are also varying light strengths (measured in lumens) and some include white light at the front and red lights at the rear, plus other options such as flashing or strobe lights.

Choices

With such a range of choice it can get confusing.

VPRC is a road (and sometimes trail) running club. At the events taking place after dark, the run leaders will look to select well-lit routes (unless at a special event such as that held at Halloween and some away evenings in which case, we will make sure our lights do the job for the terrain we are visiting).

Proper running lights sit snugly on your body or your gear as you stride. Ideally, you won't have to fuss with them during your workout.

An unreliable light could leave you in a rough situation if it runs out of power at the wrong time. Always check your lights and make sure you have spare batteries and/or the device is charged.

What to Consider When Choosing Running Lights

To See or Be Seen? - The first thing to consider is whether you're looking for a light to help you see, to help others see you, or both. Two-in-one lights (normally a light rear and at the front) can do both but most single lights will serve only one of the two purposes.

For seeing...

A light with a high lumen count is recommended—200 to 500 is ideal—and a steady beam. Some fancier lights can also switch between a spotlight and a floodlight, allowing you to change your depth of field on the run if you're changing speeds. A steady beam isn't always going to catch the attention of others, especially on a road run. LED lights usually offer several different settings, like a flashing or strobe mode and are for conditions where you simply need to catch the attention of others, such as in better-lit environments like a lamplit street. These products won't provide the same all-round illumination as more powerful headlamps and dedicated spotlights.

Dazzling - one downside of good lights, especially for our group that uses mustering as a normal part of events, is that your lights can dazzle. Be aware of this and maybe get a light you can adjust (a chest light can be covered with your fingers to diffuse the light, or you may get a directional beam that can be pointed down or to the side to prevent dazzle). Take care if you know someone is sensitive to strong light. It is a balance and all about being aware.

Mounting Options

If you're primarily concerned with making sure others can see you, select an option that can clip on or otherwise secure easily to your clothing, as these lights are most likely to stay in place and provide a better picture to other road users of where you're standing or running. On the other hand, if you want the light to follow your line of sight and illuminate potential tripping hazards, it is recommended that you use a headlamp or chest-mounted spotlight that you can more easily reach to adjust on the run.

The primary factor should be comfort. Some people dislike running with a band around their head, others don't like the straps across their torso and chest. You may run with other equipment such as a backpack or bottle holder and so weight is a factor and fitting it all together. You are also likely to be wearing more clothing on a dark run, so factor that in.

Waterproofing

If you tend to sweat a lot on your runs, or you are running in the rain, look for a light with a high IP water-resistance rating. These indicate a device's ability to block dust and water from passing through its outer shell, and they can range from IPX0 (no protection) to IPX8 (totally waterproof when submerged for sustained periods). When you see "X" like that in place of the first digit, it means the light hasn't been tested for dust resistance. If a brand has tested it for that, the

number will be between 1 and 6 to represent the device's ability to filter out solid particles.

For all-weather applications, look for an IP rating of 4 or above, but any rating will suffice on a dry evening if you don't sweat heavily.

Price and buying

If in doubt, ask other VPRC runners for recommendations. Many of our club runners have been at this for years and can give all sorts of solid advice, but remember you make the choice for what you need. You can buy online from suppliers such as Amazon, at shops such as Decathlon, Halfords etc, running specialist suppliers, even the likes of Aldi and Lidl will stock autumn special ranges. Prices can range quite a lot so shop around and look for deals.

Clothing

It may seem obvious, but you would be surprised how many runners wear a full black outfit in dark conditions! Visibility is key and there are lots of options to buy reflective and hi-visibility running gear.

Mandatory or Not!

VPRC is a running club of adults and so we don't enforce the wearing of lights. However, not only do runners have a responsibility to look after themselves, but they have a responsibility to other road users, and to support their club running colleagues. By all of us wearing proper gear, we are supporting each other, so we hope every member will follow the guidelines.

England Athletics (EA) Guidelines

Our club is not formally affiliated to any governing body, but our run leaders are licenced and accredited to UK Athletics (from 1st October 2023 to England Athletics). The following safety guidelines for running in the dark are published by England Athletics and shared to all our runners. VPRC run leaders, as part of their licence requirements, promote this advice and encourage you to run safely at club events, and in your personal running away from the club. Our run leaders will be working to keep you safe at club runs and these guidelines are more for your own personal running .

EA Guidelines

Run in daylight, but if that's not possible then stay on well-lit routes or use a torch.

Make sure you know your route, if something happens and you are unfamiliar with the area it can be harder to find help.

Download the What3Words app, especially if running in rural or quiet or unfamiliar areas. The app is used by emergency services to locate your exact position to within a three-metre square.

Take a phone if possible but keep it hidden and if for any reason an item of yours becomes a motive for an incident, do not protect it at risk to yourself, a phone can always be replaced.

Where possible, run on paths and always on the side of the road facing the oncoming traffic.

Share information with other runners on routes and paths that are safe. But be mindful of what personal information you share openly on social media. Try not to keep the exact same route all the time.

Any questions ask a run leader or post on our Facebook Group

Source: England Athletics Running Safety Guidelines and Runners World Magazine