

PRODUCT REVIEWS

WINTER JACKETS, COMPRESSION GARMENTS AND ACCESSORIES



New Balance Win Tech Jacket

Price: \$110

Weight: Medium

Adjustable Wrist/Waist: No/Yes

Converts to Vest: Yes

The New Balance Win Tech Jacket is a fully featured durable looking winter running jacket. It comes with a large range of adjustments and converts into a vest via two zippers and some velcro for each sleeve. The velcro used to affix the sleeves at the collar makes the collar region a touch heavier than ideal. The jacket itself is fully lined and very warm. Even on the coldest mornings at minus 6 it was not an issue with just a t-shirt underneath. The cut of the jacket is straightforward and it is comfortable to run in, however, the width of the sleeves is a bit big. Overall a warm jacket with the versatility of a vest as well.



Brooks NightLife Jacket

Price: \$149

Weight: Medium

Adjustable Wrist/Waist: No/Yes

Converts to Vest: No

Besides a very funky name for a winter jacket, this one has what I would consider the lot. It is a bright fluorescent yellow, very bad except for if you are wearing it predominantly in the dark (which is quite often the case in winter) in which case it's absolutely brilliant - you almost glow. Additional reflective seams ensure that you will not be missed. The material is heavy enough to be warm in sub zero and light enough to ensure you do not overheat in milder conditions. The nightlife also has a snug lined collar and is a great cut for running. With two functional pockets, you can tuck away a gel or your gloves if you get too warm. Overall I really liked this as a winter running jacket.



Nike Swift Featherlight Jacket

Price: \$120

Weight: Extra Light

Adjustable Wrist/Waist: No/No

Converts to Vest: No

The Featherlight jacket was just that, featherlight. This jacket was one of the simplest jackets that we tested and the only jacket that did not feature a full-length zipper at the front. The absence of a full-length zipper was not really an issue unless you have a problem taking the jacket on and off over your head. It has a very nice cut with good length and is surprisingly warm for such a light jacket, good even in sub zero conditions. One negative is the absence of pockets, making it not as practical for activities other than running. If you were looking for a jacket, solely for running, that is very light, comfortable and folds down to virtually nothing, then the Featherlight is ideal.



Reebok Mistral Jacket

Price: \$130

Weight: Medium

Adjustable Wrist/Waist: Yes/Yes

Converts to Vest: Yes

I have been wearing it out in conditions colder than minus 3 degrees and it has been very snug. The cut of the jacket features a curved front and back at the bottom and I found it a touch too long. I did find the sleeves were larger than they need to be, most runners are not body builders! The jacket has four pockets, including a huge one in the lower back area. More carriage space than you could ever need. The jacket also features removable sleeves and hood. Overall a great, reasonably priced jacket if you are looking for something for both running and general use.



Nike Foundation Clima Fit Jacket

Price: \$139

Weight: Light

Adjustable Wrist/Waist: Yes/Yes

Converts to Vest: No

I was pleasantly surprised when I went running in this jacket. It is very lightweight and it didn't feel bulky and annoying. It keeps the wind out a treat and I didn't overheat in it. There is an elastic pull string around the bottom of the jacket so you can pull it tight and it doesn't flap around. There are also a few pockets, convenient for carrying things such as gels etc for the long runs. The jacket was also spray proof and kept me pretty dry in light rain. Overall it had a great cut, was nice to wear and certainly warm.



Pearl Izumi Optik Jacket

Price: \$169

Weight: Extra Light

Adjustable Wrist/Waist: No/No

Converts to Vest: No

Pearl Izumi claim that this is the "lightest wind-resistant and water-repellent fabric on the market" and when you pick this jacket up, like me, you will be a believer. The fabric is amazing, it stows into a tiny ball, I could actually fit the whole jacket inside my closed hand, basically the size of a tennis ball! I found it did require some warmer undergarments when running in below zero, but above zero it was fine with just a long sleeve t-shirt underneath. Similar to the Zephrr jacket, the cut of the Optik was not what I like for running. The trunk of the jacket was very short and the sleeves quite long although they are the perfect width. If you are looking for something that can be stowed in a back-pocket for use if the weather turns, then this is perfect.



Pearl Izumi Zephrr Jacket

Price: \$159

Weight: Light

Adjustable Wrist/Waist: No/No

Converts to Vest: No

The first thing you notice about the Zephrr jacket is the fabric quality - it feels like a high quality garment. However, we found the cut did not fit in with our ideals for running. The sleeves were quite long, not so bad if you like to pull them down over your fists when you run, but the sleeves were a very good width. The torso length at the front of the Zephrr was short, which means it does not get in the way, but if you're conscious of publicly showing your groin (especially if you may also have tights on) then this may not be the best choice. The weight of the Zephrr is quite light, but even in minus 1 with a short sleeve t-shirt underneath, it was more than warm enough. The collar area is lined with polarfleece (very nice touch) and is more than adequate in size. Overall the Zephrr is a good-looking, quality jacket, but not my 'cup of tea' in terms of cut.



Puma Woven Zip-Off Jacket

Price: \$190

Weight: Light

Adjustable Wrist/Waist: Yes/Yes

Converts to Vest: Yes

Definitely one of most technical jackets tested in this review. It is actually a vest with sleeves that fit over the shoulders. There are ample mesh panels throughout the jacket, including two large portions on the sides of the trunk and two segments on each sleeve. One nifty feature of this jacket is that it doesn't actually have any material in the armpit area! The jacket features three pockets, including an extra large one in the lower back which can accommodate the sleeves if you have converted the jacket to a vest, and a key pouch in the right pocket. A two-way full length zipper is featured on the front of the jacket, but we questioned the need of a two way zipper in this location. The collar area was quite heavy due to the twelve velcro strips used to attach the two segments of the jacket together. Although it is quite light, it was unexpectedly warm and suitable for a wide range of conditions.

COMPRESSION GARMENTS

Compression Garments have become very popular over the past three years. One of the most famous athletes to utilize these products has been Paula Radcliffe who is often seen racing in compression socks.

Scientific evidence supporting this product has been sparse and largely anecdotal. As we all know strenuous physical exercise, such as running, can induce muscle damage that is often manifested as soreness. Muscle damage can lead to decreased range of motion, swelling and impaired muscle function, all increasing the likelihood of injury.

Compression may be able to reduce the physical impact and damage associated with strenuous physical activity.

Compression garments are also being used for recovery purposes. A world leading expert in the field of recovery,

William Kraemer has suggested that compression may assist recovery of injured tissues in several ways. Compression has the ability to reduce oedema (abnormal accumulation of fluid in tissues or cavities of the body) by applying an external pressure gradient and reducing the space available for swelling to accumulate. Secondly, compression can provide mechanical support that is able to facilitate the capacity to produce force, critical for recovery and rehabilitation.

Currently there is no scientific evidence for strength of compression most applicable for improvements in athletic performance and recovery. In this review, our wear testers reviewed five brands and ten styles of compression garments, outlined below.



Reebok Compression Tight

Price: \$79

Compression Strength: Light

These were labeled as compression tight, however, I found them to be similar to a normal running tight. The thickness of the material and its stretch was close to a thick running tight and thinner than several tights that are currently in my cupboard. I would not classify these as a compression garment, but as mentioned above, the jury is still out on the strength of compression required for an advantage. Also the presence of a zipper on the lower leg makes them feel more like a standard tight.



Nike Pro Compression Tight

Price: \$79

Compression Strength: Medium

The Nike Pro Compression Tight would fall right on the border of what I would classify a compression garment. The cut of the tight is not as fitted as the Skins or LineBreak garment, but it is more supportive than a normal tight, albeit just by a small margin. They are extremely comfortable, but if you are after a high degree of support from your compression garment, the Skins or LineBreak may be a better choice, although the scientific studies have not yet determined the stretch of compression required for improved performance and recovery.



Brooks Anatomical Tight

Price: \$129

Compression Strength: Medium

I like the thought that has gone into the Brooks Anatomical tight. There are sections of moderate and high compression strength throughout the tight. The thinner sections allow for greater movement without high compression and are found around the knees and groin. The thicker sections of these tights were the thickest tested and made the tights very warm, but did not feel as compressive as the LineBreak garment. I did not like the zipper section on the lower leg, quite a tight fit for a bulky zipper.



LineBreak Velocity Tight

Price: \$99

Compression Strength: Heavy

From the compression garments tested in this review, these had the strongest compression properties and once you managed to get them on, they gave the feeling of holding everything together. They were very comfortable to wear traveling and I wore them for two 15-hour flights without feeling the need to take them off at any stage. However, when running in these tights, I did feel they were a little too tight at the back of the knee.



Skins Tights Long

Price: \$139

Compression Strength: Heavy

The skins tights were probably the second strongest compression tight in terms of compression properties. These tights were a great cut for running, I found them to be very comfortable for sessions and long runs. They did not quite have the same feeling of structural stability as the LineBreak tights, but without the constriction at the back of the knee. When used for travel or recovery I found I wanted to take these tights off after 2-3 hours, probably more than adequate for recovery purposes anyhow.



"It feels like I'm running on fresh legs!"

Karen Chapman

Two and half hour training runs were a stroll for Karen so now she has started running marathons. Luckily she has also discovered LineBreak.

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LineBreak Crop Top

Price: \$59

Compression Strength: Heavy

Overall, a very comfy top to run in. It also looks great. I wear it over my sports bra and it adds even more support. You could probably wear it on its own and it would provide good support too. The material feels nice against the skin and its very breathable. Its excellent for hot days and I usually don't wear anything over the top but you could wear a shirt or thermal top on colder days. Highly recommended.



LineBreak Short Tight

Price: \$49

Compression Strength: Heavy

I found these short LineBreak Tights were great. They have the features that I like about the LineBreak Velocity tight, ie. the very strong feel, but without any problems of tightness behind the knee. They were great for both long runs and sessions and I found myself searching through the washing basket for them on several occasions, always a good sign. For recovery purposes, I think I like the longer tights more, but for running these are my favourite.



LineBreak Calf Guard

Price: \$49

Compression Strength: Heavy

The last time that I ran in long socks was at lunch-time at High School. Despite the initial strange feeling, the LineBreak Calf Guards felt good from the first time that I wore them. They were very supportive, even given the strange shape of my calves and did not move whilst running. It is always hard to monitor changes when testing a new product, but I feel the calf guards did assist in reducing calf soreness. If you have troublesome calves, this product would definitely be worth a try.



Nike Reflective Running Vest

Price: \$39

If you are running at night and on the road, than this vest is for you. It fits easily over whatever you are currently wearing and the adjustable velcro straps on each side mean you can make it nice and snug. The lightweight mesh means you hardly notice the extra layer and I can assure you, you will not be missed if there is any light around. As its name suggests this is a reflective vest, but one designed specifically for runners.



Nike Electrolite

Price: \$39

A great new armband style light made for runners and this light is very light! It provides around 20-30 hours of use with the two CR2032 watch batteries that are included with the device. It features a slapstick design for easy mounting on the arm, however this did not work as effectively as I first thought. The light is bright and you will not be missed. Also the shape of the light ensures that the light can be seen from the front and the back. Overall, a great device to make others aware of your presence on the road, footpath or bike track.

If there's anything you'd like us to review just email dgreen@runforyourlife.com.au and let us know. We'll do our best to bring you the latest and best in gear and gadgets so you'll be up to date with what's in the market place.