

## Know your sport: What to wear?

What should I wear is a question that beginners often ask. As the photo below shows, people wear all sorts of different types of clothing. Here we take a look at what is normal for competitive orienteers.



Because different people attend orienteering events for different reasons, it is not surprising that what they choose to wear can be very varied. For quite a number, particularly ramblers who have discovered the sport, orienteering may be just a way of adding an additional map-reading challenge to their walk in the country. For them, they can wear whatever they find suitable for a strenuous walk.

However, for the competitive orienteer, perhaps an enthusiastic cross-country runner looking for an additional challenge, there is a need to find suitable sports clothing. It needs to be light but capable of withstanding the extra difficulties found when running through brambles or across a hillside.

One important consideration is that the official 'Rules of Orienteering' (see right) specify that clothing needs to cover the torso and legs. Covering the legs is considered necessary when there is a high risk of people's legs being cut by brambles or other vegetation. It is considered a possibility that blood might get transferred between competitors and might lead to illness - there was a heightened level of hepatitis in Swedish orienteers at one point which might have been caused by this. The rules do allow shorts but **only** if the Organiser considers the terrain is suitable - particularly at urban or sprint events - and states that they are permitted.

### Rules of Orienteering

- 10.1 Competitors must wear clothing that fully covers their torso and legs unless the Organiser has stated otherwise and has permitted shorts to be worn.
- 10.2 If an Organiser has given notice that additional safety measures are required, competitors must comply with these requirements. These will be notified to competitors either in advance or during the event. These measures may include the following:

- The carrying of a lightweight waterproof hooded top or similar waterproof clothing, ...

### Orienteering Clothing

Regular competitive orienteers often wear light-weight polyester tops. Most clubs have designed their own club tops and shown here are BKO members wearing the long and short versions of our own tops. In cold weather it is common to wear something additional underneath - perhaps a 'Helly Hansen' running vest.

To cover the legs, similar light-weight polyester trousers are common. However depending upon individual preference these might be either full-length or shorter (just covering to below the knee). In the latter case, long socks will be used to ensure that the requirement for covered legs is met.

What is required is clothing which does not simply absorb lots of water whether on a wet rainy day or from the various marshes and streams that may be encountered out on a course. Running with heavy clothing will significantly slow you down. It may also make you cold if the weather is cold or windy.



### Footwear

Most orienteers look for shoes which combine a light weight with a sole that provides a good grip in muddy conditions. However as there might be a great variety of terrains encountered during an event it is often a compromise. Typical examples are shown on the right.

Some people will have different shoes for different terrains. One type of shoe has short metal spikes (or 'dobbs') which provide additional grip on certain surfaces - crossing wood or ice for example. For urban or sprint events where most of the race will be on hard surfaces, flat-soled shoes will be preferred. In these areas, organisers also sometimes prohibit the use of 'dobbs'.

And to stop the laces coming undone during a race, try wrapping the ends tightly together with some insulating tape - it also is easier to undo at the end compared to tight knots.

### Gaiters

As orienteers often take routes through woods with areas of brambles, the standard light-weight trousers are at risk of tearing. It is very common for orienteers to then wear special gaiters to provide extra protection. In fact these also come with some additional padding down the front as the shins are prone to bumps with cut branches and the padding reduces the damage.

### Miscellaneous

Also to be seen are sweatbands around the head (they also help stop the loss of glasses in a fall). Talking of glasses, some orienteers find using a 'rain visor' helps keep the rain off and enables the map to be seen when otherwise it would be difficult.

Finally remember that you may be required to take a cagoule with you if the weather is bad so it is good practice to have one in your kit bag.



Although it is possible to get running shoes at many high street outlets, for orienteering kit, it is best to use a retailer that specialises in the sport and appreciates the specific requirements. Of course these are not very common in the average high street. There are two main suppliers which have good on-line sites but which often travel to events. The two main suppliers of orienteering equipment are:

- **Ultrasport:** [www.ultrasport.co.uk](http://www.ultrasport.co.uk)
- **Compass Point:** [www.compasspoint-online.co.uk/](http://www.compasspoint-online.co.uk/)

