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Moisture-wicking, polypropylene, elastane, Wick. Q technology – decoding the meaning of words commonly found on fitness labels can be as difficult as deciphering a foreign language. No worries! We're here to tell you what these words mean and why they matter when it comes to fitness wear; and we're even going to share with you a few of our favorite picks.

Technical Fabric: A Brief History

Browse photos of marathon runners from the 1970s and you'll find them dressed in a basic cotton tee. (Did we just hear a collective gasp!) Then, in 1984 with the help of a NASA scientist, an aluminum-coated uniform was created for the US Olympic team. (ref: http://www.slate.com/articles/sports/fivering_circus/2012/08/olympic_uniforms_from_loose_and_heavy_to_tight_and_dimpled_a_visual_history_of_olympic_sprinting_attire_.html) This fabric promoted moisture wicking during physical activity.

Today the majority of fitness wear is designed with some type of technical fabric, and most athletes avoid cotton fabric like it's a contagious disease. Why this shun of cotton when it's time to break a sweat? That comfy shirt you love to sleep in soaks through when wet, retaining moisture like a sponge and trapping it next to your skin. Imagine hiking the Pacific Trail in colder temps and a light rain. One mile in and you're wet from the inside out and cold all over – not to mention ready to hang up your hiking boots for a spot inside by a fire.

Yet if you swap out that cotton garb for tech clothes, the wicking material will pull perspiration away from your skin as you sweat, keeping your core temperature regulated. Your outfit will dry faster than its cotton competitor, and, despite the wet conditions, you'll feel toasty, dry and ready to hike for miles.

Fabrics designed with wicking material are also thinner and lighter than cotton, which means you won't have to layer up so much that you resemble the Marshmallow Man when you leave your house; unless, of course, you want to resemble him. (We won't judge.)

Just What Are Tech Clothes Made Of?

Most technical clothing is constructed of polyester or polypropylene. Both materials spread, rather than absorb, water, and both dry fairly quickly. Polypropylene dries faster and absorbs less moisture than polyester, but a high content of either in your workout garb is a good sign. Nylon may also be listed on the label. Of these three, nylon absorbs the most water, but it dries quickly once wet. Wool, which you may not think of as being used in fitness clothing, is also an excellent insulator and is naturally odor resistance. (Ref used for first three: <http://www.qualitylogoproducts.com/blog/polypropylene-polyester-nylon-guide-to-materials/>)

Many clothing manufacturers design their own specific wicking technology using the materials listed above. For instance, Wick.Q is a wicking technology used in clothing manufactured by Mountain Hardwear. The key, then, to choosing the best product for your particular adventure is

matching the main fabric content of the piece to the activity and the conditions you'll encounter during your journey.

Gear Guide

From the tops of your earsies to the tips of your toesies, tech gear can keep you warm, dry and comfortable. Here we share some of our favorite picks and the reasons why we love them.

Top it Off

Sports Bra

Trash that cotton workout bra and reach for the Shockingly Unshocking sports bra from New Balance instead. Featuring a liner composed of moisture-wicking fabric, this sports bra works for any type of exercise or weather. The bra's straps can be easily adjusted mid-workout, too, which means no slippage or strap digs in the shoulders. <https://www.zozi.com/gear/15235>

Cycling

Pedaling in the heat raises your heart rate and temperature, but this Icefit Jersey from Louis Garneau (available for both men and women) will keep you cool when the going gets hot. Designed to lower your body's temp, this jersey also boasts as UPF of 50+ to keep your skin protected from the rays on long rides. <https://www.zozi.com/gear/15063>

Tank

From hot yoga to a steamy run in the sun, this lightweight racer keeps you dry and cool. "Wick.Q is our industry leading wicking technology that disperses moisture so it evaporates more quickly," explains Dana Davol, sales representative for Mountain Hardwear. Available in red plum or black. <https://www.zozi.com/gear/15146>

Short Sleeve

When versatility matters, Icebreaker's Men's Tech T Lite short sleeve shirt is the only shirt you need. Jason Telford, Icebreaker Account Manager for Northern California and Northern Nevada, says, "It climbs, hikes, SUPS, travel the globe with a carry-on bag, walks the dog, gets coffee, washes the car . . ." and more, all without wrinkling and stinking and staying wet. 100% merino wool and ultra-lightweight, this is the shirt all of your other shirts hope to be. <https://www.zozi.com/gear/13663>

Long Sleeve

Heading out for a hike in the cold? Composed of 100% wool, this men's long sleeve tech top <https://www.zozi.com/gear/7601> works to regulate your core's temperature. "Nature has engineered the fiber to keep the sheep alive in blistering heat and freezing cold," says Jason, and it will do the same for you. This top features an added feature for hikers: Offset shoulder seams to prevent rubbing from your pack.

Bottoms Up!

Shorts

Who wears short shorts? You'll want to when you try on these New Balance running shorts, made of 87% polyester for wicking purposes and 13% spandex for comfort. A 3.5 inch inseam means these shorts fit perfectly on the thighs, and a performance gusset stops them from riding up. New Balance's Dry thermoregulation packs a comfort punch for hot weather runs.

<https://www.zozi.com/gear/15234>

Wetter climates can pose problems when it comes to fitness clothing, but these nylon shorts by Mountain Hardwear take the guesswork out of selecting the perfect rainy day gear

<https://www.zozi.com/gear/15189>. Designed with 100% nylon, these shorts feel light and dry quickly. An added finish, DWR (Durable Water Repellent), helps to inhibit stains while repelling water.

Pants

Keeping your legs covered in the colder weather months could mean the difference between a great hike and a bad case of frostbite. Stay toasty in The North Face's Sally Pant. Waterproof 100% polyester twill keeps the exterior of the pants dry, and insulation means you stay warm in even the coldest of conditions. <https://www.zozi.com/gear/15051>

If it's not too cold and not too hot, a warm up pant like these from Under Armour is just right. 100% polyester material and a moisture-wicking lining keeps sweat away from your legs as you get ready for your workout of choice – or throughout the entire workout if you don't feel like changing pants. <https://www.zozi.com/gear/14641>

Outer Wear

Thumbholes on winter runs make us smile, and so does Mountain Hardwear's Mighty Power Hybrid Jacket .14% elastane content paired with nylon means you stay dry and warm while stretch side panels mean the jacket moves with you when you're sprinting around the track or pumping your arms as you climb the tallest hill. <https://www.zozi.com/gear/15192>

Mountain treks during winter months require special consideration when it comes to clothing, which is why we love the Peak Packable Hooded Jacket. Easily foldable, this jacket can be tucked in your pack when not in use without bogging you down with added weight. When worn, its winning combination of a 100% nylon shell and 100% polyester lining made with Polyfill insulation protects you from the elements. <https://www.zozi.com/gear/14456>

Mountain Hardwear's DrySpun pullover hoody goes from winter walk to casual meal out in minutes. Cute and functional, this jacket is comprised of DrySpun, which, explains Dana Davol, is a mixture of polyester and elastane. The hoody also features Wick Q. technology and a UPF of 25. <https://www.zozi.com/gear/15148>

Socks

Give your piggies some love with Icebreaker's Hike + Light crew. Naturally odor resistant, these hikers have a high merino wool content for warmth and medium cushioning in the sole for

comfort. Paired with an anti-blister toe seam, this sock makes an afternoon hike so easy you'll never want to return home. <https://www.zozi.com/gear/7>

Twitter's all a, well, twitter with the benefits of compression socks for endurance running. Benefits of this athletic sock include supporting muscle fatigue and helping with recovery after a run. The Elite Compression from 2XU features elastane yarn placement for comfort and wicking properties to keep your feet dry and your leg muscles going during a 5K sprint or 26.2 extra-long miles. <https://www.zozi.com/gear/7909>

Technical Gear for All Athletes

Whether you are training for your first 5K or trekking the Appalachian Trail for the nineteenth time, technical gear offers multiple benefits. The key: Pair the right type of gear with the activity of choice and the predicted weather conditions you'll encounter during your trek. Reading the labels should be your first step. Your next step: Get outside and break a sweat.