

## COLD WEATHER TIPS FOR SENIORS

Biting cold, ice-slicked sidewalks and roadways, and storms that shut down businesses, schools, and services—winter aggravations can create serious safety risks for seniors.

Yet with some planning, preparation, and caution, seniors can stay safe and even enjoy some time outdoors this season.

### Seven tips for senior safety in cold weather

1. Make sure your home and its heat source are safe, secure, and reliable. Before the weather turns cold, have your home's furnace serviced. Change air filters throughout the house every 30 days. Check the insulation in your attic to ensure it meets government standards. Seniors can be more susceptible to the negative effects of cold, including joint discomfort, dry skin, chapped lips, and general discomfort.
2. Stay in touch. Isolation can be a problem for seniors throughout the year, but it can be life-threatening in bad weather. Be sure you check in regularly with someone whenever the weather turns bad. Establish a call schedule with a family member or another senior so they know to expect you to check in regularly. This way, if something prevents you from

making your regular call—be it illness or injury—your winter watch buddy can send help.

3. Outdoor exercise in fresh, brisk air can be beneficial to your mental and physical well-being. Take care when walking outdoors on ice or snow. Invest in equipment that can help you stay sure-footed. Stabilicer Lite, a cleat-like device fits over most shoes and provides traction on snow and ice. The cleats are easy to put on or remove, so they're good for seniors who might have dexterity challenges. And don't forget to place a floor mat by the door to catch snow and ice melting off your shoes and Stabilicers.
4. Be extra cautious when driving. Be sure your vehicle is in good repair and not likely to leave you sitting on the roadside in dangerously cold weather. Invest in good snow or all-weather tires, or snow chains if you live in an area that permits them. Avoid non-essential driving when the roads are bad, and schedule necessary trips during daylight hours when there is less traffic on the road.
5. Stock up on non-perishable food items. Choose options like peanut butter, almonds, other nuts, cheeses, and boxed milk that provide heat- and energy-generating protein. Keep some items on hand that require no cooking, in case you are without power during or after a winter storm.

6. Keep a flashlight with fresh batteries, candles, a fully charged cell phone, and a portable radio on hand for emergencies.
7. Be sure your home is well lit inside and out during winter months when sunlight is dimmer and a covering of snow can impair your vision. When walking outside on a bright, snow-covered day use polarizing sunglasses to diminish glare and improve visual acuity.

With some simple precautions like preparing for storms and using Stabilicers when outdoors, seniors can feel safe and secure during winter months.

### Walking Tips for Seniors

Seniors who walk for exercise need to take these precautions:

- Warm up and cool down. Stretching improves circulation and decreases build-up of lactic acid -- the chemical byproduct that causes muscles to ache.

- Choose proper foot gear. Buying shoes is virtually the only necessary expense for walking, so don't cut corners on your shoe budget.
- Pay attention to your feet. Changes and/or pain in the feet and ankles are not normal and could indicate a serious foot ailment or circulatory problem.
- Walk on soft ground. With age, the natural shock absorbers (or "fat padding") in your feet deteriorate, as does bone density.
- Avoid walking in cold weather. Cold weather can cause numbness, limiting your ability to detect trauma or wounds to the feet.
- If you have diabetes, use extra care. Diabetics are prone to infection from even minor injuries.
- Exercise smart. Knowing your limits and exercising with caution can avoid injuries and frustration.

### Dress for the Occasion

- Layering clothing preserves body heat. Long underwear, a fleece or wool sweater, a wind/water proof jacket are good options.
- Avoid wearing cotton next to your skin. It absorbs sweat and stays wet.
- A hat, scarf and mittens or gloves are

essential accessories that help prevent heat loss.

- Bright colors or adding reflective material to clothing can help others see you better.
- Protect exposed skin with sunscreen and lip balm, SPF 15 or more.
- Wear sunglasses with UVA and UVB rating.

### Put Your Best Foot Forward

For warmth and stability look for the following when choosing a winter boot:

- Well insulated and waterproof
- A thick, non-slip tread sole
- A wide and low heel
- Light in weight
- Ice grippers on footwear can improve walking on hard packed snow and ice and may help prevent falls.

### Be careful!

- Grippers become dangerously slippery and must be removed before walking on smooth surfaces such as stone, tile and ceramic.
- Before buying the grippers, be sure that you are able to attach and remove them from your boots, this is best done sitting down.

### Get Around Safely

- Wear a cane to help with balance.

Have it fitted to the right height for you. When cane is upside down, end should be at wrist level. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist about how to use your cane properly.

- Attach an ice pick at the end of your cane. Cane picks will be slippery on hard surfaces so be sure to flip it back as you get indoors. Picks are available at most drug stores.
- If you need further support use a walker. Cost can be covered by government programs. Talk with your doctor.
- Wear hip protectors, a lightweight belt or pant with shields to guard the hips. It can help protect the hips against fractures and give added confidence.