

TAB Monthly Newsletter

A Newsletter for people living with COPD to help us connect with our peers

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Safety Tips for Winter Walking

Winter can be a challenging time of year to get out and about. Freezing rain, icy surfaces and piles of hard-packed snow pose a hazard for the innocent pedestrian. Just one bad fall on ice can have long-term consequences. These include: chronic pain in the affected area; a disabling injury that may mean loss of independence; or fear of another fall, which discourages a healthy, active lifestyle.

The Canada Safety Council offers seniors some practical suggestions to stay active in winter.

As winter approaches, outfit yourself for safe walking:

1. Choose a good pair of winter boots. For warmth and stability look for these features: well-insulated, waterproof, thick non-slip tread sole made of natural rubber, wide low heels, light-weight.
2. Ice grippers on footwear can help you walk on hard packed snow and ice. But 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.
3. Use a cane, or even a pair of ski poles or walking sticks to help with balance. Make sure they're the right height for you. When your cane is held upside down, the end should be at wrist level. Speak to your doctor, pharmacist or local public health department about how to use a cane properly.
4. If using a cane, attach a retractable ice pick to the end. Cane picks will be slippery on hard surfaces so be sure to flip it back as you get indoors. Picks are inexpensive and available at most drug stores.
5. If you need further support, use a walker. The cost might be defrayed by government programs; talk with your doctor.
6. Wear a [hip protector](#) (a lightweight belt or pant with shields to guard the hips). It can help protect the hips against fractures and give added confidence.
7. Help other road users see you by wearing bright colors or adding reflective material to clothing.
8. Prevent heat loss by wearing a warm hat, scarf, and mittens or gloves. Dressing in layers may also keep you warmer.

Once the snow and ice arrive, make sure your walking surfaces are safe:

1. Keep entranceways and sidewalks clear of ice and snow. Report hazards on sidewalks or pathways to your landlord or the City.
2. Contact your local home support agency or other community services for help with snow removal, transportation and grocery bus services.
3. Carry a small bag of grit, sand or non clumping cat litter in your jacket pocket or handbag, to sprinkle when you are confronted with icy sidewalks, steps, bus stops, etc.
4. Ask a passer-by to help you cross an icy surface.

Walking on Ice

Facing an icy surface can be a paralyzing experience. Not everyone has grippers and other safety aids. So, what should you do if it's impossible to avoid an icy patch? Believe it or not, body movements can increase your stability on an icy surface.

1. Slow down and think about your next move. Keeping your body as loose as possible, spread your feet to more than a foot apart to provide a base of support. This will help stabilize you as you walk.
2. Keep your knees loose -- let them bend a bit. This will keep your centre of gravity lower to the ground, which further stabilizes the body.
3. Now you are ready to take a step. Make the step small, placing your whole foot down at once. Then shift your weight very slowly to this foot and bring your other foot to meet it the same way. Keep a wide base of support.
4. Some people prefer to drag their feet or shuffle them. If this feels better to you, then do so. Just remember to place your whole foot on the ice at once and keep your base of support approximately one foot wide.

Of course, it's always better to avoid tricky situations by being prepared and planning a safe route for your walk.

Sources: Ottawa Public Health, Niagara Region Public Health

Seven Steps to Cold Weather Safety

- 1) Listen To The Weather Forecast: Check the Environment Canada weather forecast before going out... Listen for a **wind chill** warning. Warnings are based on local climate and are issued when significant wind chills are expected... Weather and Meteorology website: <http://ec.gc.ca/meteo-weather/> ...Weather forecasts are available through radio and TV broadcasts, Environment Canada's Weatheradio service, and online at www.weatheroffice.gc.ca
- 2) Plan Ahead: Develop a cold weather **safety plan in advance** to ensure that safety concerns are addressed when it's very cold, or when the wind chill is significant. For example, schools could hold recess indoors, outside workers could schedule warm-up breaks, and those involved in winter recreation could reduce the amount of time they spend outdoors.
- 3) Dress Warmly: Dress in **layers**, with a wind resistant outer layer... When it is cold, **wear a hat**, mittens or insulated gloves. Keep your face warm with a scarf, neck tube or facemask... Wear warm and waterproof footwear. When it is very cold, or when the wind chill is significant, cover as much exposed skin as possible. Your body's extremities, such as the ears, nose, fingers and toes lose heat the fastest.
- 4) Seek Shelter: When the wind chill is significant, get out of the wind and limit the time you spend outside.
- 5) Stay Dry: Wet clothing chills the body rapidly... Remove outer layers of clothing or open your coat if you are sweating.
- 6) Keep Active: Walking or running will help warm you by generating body heat.
- 7) Be Aware: Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia (Go to www.canada.ca to search "hypothermia")... Some people are more susceptible to the cold, particularly children, the elderly and those with circulation problems... Check on elderly relatives and neighbours to ensure they are warm enough and have sufficient supplies, particularly when the weather is cold or snowy. They might not feel comfortable going outside to shop and may require food, medications and other supplies... The use of alcohol, tobacco and certain medications will increase your susceptibility to cold.
Sources: Environment Canada/Public Safety Canada - [GetPrepared.ca](http://www.getprepared.ca) - www.canada.ca

Be Prepared

Check the Car

Driving during the winter can be hazardous for anyone. But it is especially dangerous for older people, who may not drive as often anymore or whose reflexes may not be as quick as they once were. Get your car serviced before wintertime hits -- or ask a family member to bring it to a garage for you. Checking things like the oil, tires, battery and wipers can make a big difference on winter roads. Also make sure your [CAA membership](#) is up-to-date in case of emergencies.

Learn the [Warning Signs a Senior Shouldn't Be Driving](#)

Prepare for Power Outages

Winter storms can lead to power outages. Make sure you have easy access to flashlights and a battery-powered radio in case the power goes out. Stockpile warm blankets. Longer power outages can spoil the food in your refrigerator and freezer so keep a supply of non-perishable foods that can be eaten cold on hand. If the power goes out, wear several layers of clothing, including a hat. Move around a lot to raise your body temperature.

Fight Wintertime Depression

Because it can be difficult and dangerous to get around, many seniors have less contact with others during cold months. This can breed feelings of loneliness and isolation. To help avoid these issues, family members can check in on seniors as often as possible; even a short, daily phone call can make a big difference. Seniors can also arrange a check-in system with neighbors and friends, where each person looks in on one or two others daily. For more information on this topic, read our article on [Getting Help with the Holiday Blues](#)

Ask For Help

The most important tip to keep in mind during the colder months is to ask for help. If you need to clear your property of snow and ice, don't hesitate to ask a family member or neighbor, or hire a professional. Arrange rides to the grocery store and doctor's appointments - many communities have shuttle services specifically for seniors. [Finding a caregiver](#) to assist a senior on a regular basis can also help keep you safer all year round. Don't be afraid to reach out for help. Wintertime certainly poses challenges for seniors, but with a bit of planning and awareness, you will stay healthy and experience the joys of springtime soon enough. www.care.com

Smoke Alarms

The Fire Department reminds people to change their smoke alarm batteries when they set their clocks back. Ontario Fire Code requires a working smoke alarm on every floor of a home, including basements and outside of sleeping areas. They should be replaced every 10 years and tested monthly. www.hamilton.ca/fire

"If you can't breathe, nothing else matters"

Canadian Lung Association

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