



## **Help older people prepare for power outages and more unique challenges of wintertime weather.**

During the winter months, ice, snow and cold temperatures can make life challenging for anyone. Slippery sidewalks and cold weather can cause a wide range of injuries and illnesses – especially for seniors. Check out the tips below that are specific to winter for preventing common cold-weather dangers that the elderly population faces.

### **1. Avoid Slipping on Ice**

Icy, snowy roads and sidewalks make it easy to slip and fall. “Unfortunately, falls are common occurrences for senior citizens, especially during the winter months. Often these falls cause major injuries such as hip and wrist fractures, head trauma and major lacerations. Older adults face complications, which are a leading cause of death from injury in men and women over the age of 65. Make sure to wear shoes with good traction and non-skid soles, and stay inside until the roads are clear. Replace a worn cane tip to making walking easier. Take off shoes as soon as you return indoors because often snow and ice attach to the soles and, once melted, can lead to slippery conditions inside.

### **2. Dress for Warmth**

Cold temperatures can lead to frostbite and hypothermia—a condition where the body temperature dips too low. According to the CDC, more than half of hypothermia-related deaths were of people over the age of 65. So, don’t let indoor temperature go too low, and dress in layers. Going outside? Wear warm socks, a heavy coat, a warm hat, gloves and a scarf. In very cold temperatures, cover all exposed skin. Use a scarf to cover your mouth and protect your lungs. Your body temperature should never dip below 95 degrees—if it does, get medical assistance immediately.

### **3. 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,

or arrange for their loved ones to attend a senior center or adult day care; a short, daily phone call can also 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. In addition, some fire departments call seniors on a daily basis (check with your local department).

#### **4. Check the Car**

Driving during the winter can be hazardous for anyone. However, it is especially dangerous for older people, who may not drive as often anymore, or whose reflexes may not be quite as they once were. Get your car serviced before wintertime hits—or ask a family member to take it to the garage for you. Checking things like the oil, battery and wipers can make a big difference on winter roads. If you must get out for medical appointments, call the local senior center to see if they offer transportation.

#### **5. 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, which can be eaten cold. If the power goes out, wear several layers of clothing, including a hat. Move around a lot to raise your body temperature. Check out the winter weather checklist on the CDC's website.

#### **6. Eat a Varied Diet**

Because people spend more time indoors and may eat a smaller variety of foods, nutritional deficits—especially Vitamin D deficiency—can be a problem. Consume foods that are fortified with Vitamin D, such as milk, grains and seafood options like tuna and salmon.

#### **7. Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning**

Using a fireplace, gas heater or lanterns can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning. Ensure your safety by checking the batteries on your carbon monoxide detector, and buying an updated one if you need to. 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 grocery stores and doctor's appointments through your local senior center or through friends and neighbors. 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.

