



Brave Winter Elements Safely...
Cold Weather Measures are Critically Important for Elders
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Frigid temperatures -- and the snow, ice and wind that come with it -- take a physical toll on everyone, but pose an even greater risk of health problems to older adults.

It is critically important for people to limit their exposure to the elements to short periods, stay dry and always wear a hat, gloves or mittens, a coat, boots and a scarf that covers their mouth and nose.

Hypothermia is a deadly drop in body temperature. The warning signs of hypothermia include severe shivering; cold skin that is pale or ashy; feeling very tired, confused and sleepy; feeling weak; problems walking; and slowed breathing or heart rate.

Frostbite is deep damage to the skin, usually affecting the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers and toes. People with heart disease and circulation problems are more likely to get frostbite. The telltale signs include numbness, ashy or grayish-yellow skin and skin that feels hard or waxy.

Falls are a leading cause of disability and death in seniors and the risk of falls increases significantly in the winter. To lower the odds of a fall, do not walk on icy or snowy sidewalks; wear boots with non-skid soles and replace the rubber tips on canes or walkers that have been worn smooth from use (replacements are available at most pharmacies).

If someone you know shows the signs of hypothermia or frostbite or takes a fall, dial 9-1-1 to get help immediately!

Also, play it safe with hazardous driving conditions:

- *Keep your vehicle in good working order and slow down on icy roads or avoid them, if possible.*
- *Carry a cell phone to call for help.*
- *Maintain at least half a tank of fuel at all times, in case you get stranded.*
- *Have your eyes examined and always wear prescription lenses. Do not wear glasses with sidepieces that could obstruct your view.*
- *Wear a safety belt and be sure it is adjusted properly.*
- *Be aware of the surrounding cars on the roadways, and maintain a safe distance between your car and the car in front of you.*
- *Always use turn signals and go as slowly as necessary to stay in your lane when turning. Ensure your vehicle's mirrors are properly adjusted.*
- *Drive the speed limit, and stay in the right lane whenever possible. Do not drive too slowly because this can be just as unsafe as speeding.*
- *Scan the road for signs and signals. Know road signs by shape, and know what they mean.*
- *Drive during non-rush hours whenever possible, and try to stay on familiar roads.*
- *Do not feel pressured into making a turn or passing until you are sure you can do so safely.*
- *If you are taking medicine, even non-prescription, ask your doctor or pharmacist if it could affect your driving.*

On a more general note, it is important as we age to be honest about our driving skill and our limits -- *and adjust our driving practices accordingly*. Vision, strength, flexibility and overall health are important factors that affect driving skills. Periodically re-evaluating our driving skills ensures our own safety and that of others on the road.

References: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety and the Ohio Department of Public Safety



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