

Healthy aging it's your move!

WINTER SAFETY TIPS

One in three older adults fall each year. Slippery streets, icy walkways and heavy snow conditions are winter hazards that could contribute to a tragic fall event even for healthy and active older adults. The good news is that most falls are predictable and preventable!

Safe winter footwear

Safe choices for winter footwear include: Footwear that provides warmth and stability; are waterproof, lightweight and well insulated; and those that have a low, wide heel with wide treads and non-skid soles made of natural rubber. Anti-slip devices can reduce the rate of falling. These devices can be worn over winter footwear when walking over hard-packed snow or ice, providing extra traction/grip. However, anti-slip devices must be removed when walking on smooth surfaces (e.g. tile, concrete or stone) to avoid slipping.

Avoid falls this winter season

- Wear boots or overshoes that have a wide tread, low heel, non-skid soles and fit properly
- Dress in layers to stay warmer for longer so you won't feel cold and be tempted to rush back indoors
- Keep all walkways and steps clear of snow and ice. Store shovels and salt or grit containers within easy reach of entry and exit doors. Consider asking someone to help shovel, if needed
- Watch out for ice! If you do walk on ice, slow down, keep your arms out at your sides, bend your knees a little and take tiny steps with your feet pointed outwards

- Carry a small packet of ice melters such as sand, grit, or cat litter in your purse or bag to spread on icy patches when walking
- Wipe up any melted snow and ice from your entryway so you don't slip
- Make sure steps, walkways and entryways are well-lit at night
- When using stairs, hold on to the handrail
- Wear sunglasses to reduce glare from snow/ice. This will help you to safely choose your next step
- Carry parcels and other large loads by your side so you can see where you will take your next step
- On bad weather days, take a bus or taxi to and from a shopping trip – it could be less expensive than a fall. If your balance is not good, stay indoors on icy days
- When outside, use a cane or walking poles for more balance. Inspect your cane tip to be sure it is not worn out and consider attaching a retractable ice pick-like device to the end of it when walking on ice

PUBLIC HEALTH

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Winter blues

It is important to stay active and connected during the cold winter months for your mental and physical well-being. When going out, be sure to phone a friend or family member to let them know where you are going and when to expect you back. Consider joining a mall walking group or walking inside your home or residential building with a friend. These tips will help you to stay safe, stay active and stay in touch.

Staying safe and warm during winter

Snowy, cloudy days can make it difficult to see and be seen. Make yourself stand out this winter by wearing brightly coloured clothing or adding reflective material to your clothes. Be sure to cover up and bundle up by wearing warm boots, a brightly coloured winter coat, hat or toque, scarf and mittens (mittens trap heat better than gloves). Dress in layers by wearing multiple layers of thinner, well-fitted clothing, and clothing made of wool that can trap heat better and keep you warmer for longer.

Winter walking

Penguins are experts at safely walking over ice and snow-covered ground. Here is how you can do it too:

- Bend both knees and keep them loose to lower your centre of gravity and give you more balance
- Hold your arms slightly out to the side, away from your body to help keep your balance
- Be sure to point your feet slightly outwards to widen your stance and create a wide base of support
- Walk slowly with your whole foot so more of your foot is touching the ground and you are less likely to slip
- Hold on to handrails, your vehicle or walls, or sprinkle snow or ice melters, such as grit or cat litter, on the ground for grip before taking a step. Avoid icy areas or ask for help

Signs of hypothermia may include any of the following: slowed breathing and heartbeat; problems walking; feeling tired, sleepy, and confused; or cold and pale skin. Signs of frostbite may include any of the following: parts of your body feeling numb; skin feeling hard or waxy; or skin becoming white, ashy or grayish-yellow in colour. Call 911 if you suspect either of these.

For more information or to request a copy of Your Guide to Fall Prevention, contact York Region Public Health.