



# Winter Health Watch



## Frostbite and Hypothermia

Everyone is potentially at risk of death or injury during winter storms. Persons with pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes, heart disease or alcoholism are at a higher risk for cold injuries. Two main dangers of the cold are frostbite and hypothermia.

**Frostbite** is damage to body tissue caused by the freezing of the body tissue. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in the extremities. Especially vulnerable are fingers, toes, ear lobes, and the tip of the nose.

If symptoms are detected, get medical attention immediately! If medical assistance is not available, slowly rewarm the affected areas. Gradually rewarm extremities in warm (not hot) water, because hot water will cause more damage to the tissue! Do not rub the affected areas, as you can increase tissue damage.

**Mild hypothermia** is when the body temperature drops below normal. Symptoms to look for include uncontrollable shivering, and a core temperature between 95° and 98° Fahrenheit (35° to 37° Celsius).

To treat mild hypothermia, get the person into dry clothing and wrap him or her in a warm blanket covering the head and neck. Do not give the person alcohol, drugs, or coffee. A warm, caffeine-free beverage is better. Do not warm extremities or take a warm bath because those actions can worsen core hypothermia and increase demands on the heart. If symptoms worsen or last more than 30 minutes, seek medical attention.

**Severe hypothermia** symptoms are when a person's core temperature drops below 95° Fahrenheit (35° Celsius). Shivering may have ceased and disorientation, memory loss, slurred speech, drowsiness, exhaustion, incoherence or unconsciousness may occur. If a person is suffering from severe hypothermia, wrap the person in a blanket and call 911 or go to the emergency room. Do not attempt to treat severe hypothermia on your own!

## A Few Ways to Protect Yourself From the Bitter Cold

- ✓ Avoid alcohol and cigarettes before going outside
- ✓ Wear many layers of clothing and cover your head, hands, and face. As much as 50% of heat loss is through the head
- ✓ Keep your feet dry and warm
- ✓ Do not leave pets outside without shelter for long periods.

## Winter Walking Safety Advice

Proper footwear is essential when walking on the streets, parking lots, and sidewalks during winter months. Consider wearing wool socks which will keep feet warm, even if wet. Choose winter boots with rubber soles and good traction or lugged sole shoes to avoid slippage.

Be careful not to overload yourself by carrying too many items. Carrying too much could block your view or shift your weight on slippery spots, causing you to fall. Watch where you are going. Avoid slippery spots and slow down. As a pedestrian, remember it takes a car much longer to stop on ice and snow.

## Winter Exercise

We all know the benefits of exercising – it increases our energy level, makes us feel and look better, and improves our cardiovascular health. A daily dose of exercise can help beat the winter blues that can come from short days and lack of fresh air. Unfortunately, many of us let our exercise habits go in the winter months, and before we know it, the body we hid under bulky layers is exposed (literally) by spring break or swimsuit weather.

The most important thing to keep in mind when exercising in the cold is to dress warmly. Always wear a hat and gloves. Avoid wearing cotton next to the skin in bitter cold weather. Perspiration can get it damp and it then does not insulate to keep you warm, but will instead cause heat loss. Wear long underwear (preferably polypropylene) to absorb and release sweat. Outerwear should be of a water-repellant fabric like nylon that allows sweat evaporation and encourages freedom of movement. Remember to drink lots of water when you are done exercising! Water replaces fluid lost through sweat and helps to keep your skin moisturized in the harsh weather.

Below is a list of a few fun winter activities and the calories burned. Use the proper equipment and have fun!

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Approximate Calories Burned in 20 Minutes</u>
Cross-country skiing	205
Down-hill skiing	169
Ice Hockey	54
Ice Skating	100
Jogging (6 mph)	160
Running (7 mph)	245
Snow Shoveling	136
Walking ( 2 mph)	83
Walking (4.5 mph)	100

### **Cold and Flu Prevention**

The two most common illnesses during the winter months are colds and flu because of our tendency to stay inside during the cold weather. Our closed quarters make it easier to catch these diseases from one another.

There are ways to prevent catching these illnesses. By following these tips you may greatly lower your risk of catching a cold or the flu.

- ❖ Receive the flu immunization in the fall
- ❖ Avoid contact with cold and flu viruses as much as possible. Avoid crowds during cold and flu outbreaks. Keep your distance from people with colds. Avoid touching your mouth, nose or eyes, and wash hands frequently. If someone at home has a cold or flu, use separate dishes, towels, etc. Place used tissues in a paper bag and change the bag frequently.
- ❖ Keep your resistance up with good health habits. Eat a well-balanced diet, with extra fruits and fruit juices during flu season. Get enough sleep. Avoid stress, which lowers your resistance. Exercise regularly for at least 20 minutes, 3 or more times a week. Don't smoke – smoking damages air passages, making them less able to resist virus attacks.
- ❖ Keep humidity high. Low humidity indoors during winter dries out respiratory passages, which may increase susceptibility to cold and flu viruses. Use a humidifier to help keep relative humidity at 30-45%. Be sure to clean it daily so it is not a breeding ground for bacteria.

### **Winterizing Your Car**

Winterizing your car could keep you out of an accident. In fact the chances of being involved in a car crash are highest in November and December because people's cars – and their driving habits – aren't properly prepared. So have your exhaust system, battery, heater, defroster, wiper blades, washer fluid, emergency signals, headlights, tires and brakes checked. All-season radial tires are a good bet for safe winter handling. But don't use studded tires (they are illegal) and don't deflate your tires thinking you'll get better traction (you won't). If you have anti-lock brakes, don't pump your brakes. See your owner's manual for proper use.

Keep a winter survival kit in your car made from items in your household. Include the things you may need in case of an emergency:

- A snow shovel
- A scraper
- Jumper cables
- Tow chains or a tow strap
- Warm clothing and sleeping bags or blankets
- Sand, cat litter, traction mats or carpet strips
- High-energy food such as nuts, dried fruit and candy
- A watertight can for candles and matches
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Cell phone

### **Winter Driving in Wisconsin**

The number one cause of winter driving accidents is people driving too fast. The posted signs are meant for dry summer road conditions.

Keep abreast of weather conditions. For Wisconsin road condition updates, call 1-800-ROADWIS (1-800-762-3947) or click on [www.dot.wisconsin.gov/travel/road/winter-roads.htm](http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/travel/road/winter-roads.htm). If you do get caught in a winter storm, keep your eyes on the road. Winter storms can get nasty in a hurry. Use extra caution during the first few minutes of snow or rain because the pavement gets slippery when precipitation mixes with oil, grease and dirt.

Be careful in warming temperatures because ice can be wet at 30°, and twice as slippery as "dry" ice at zero. Changing temperatures often cause fog. A fog bank is harder to see when there is snow on the ground, so keep your eyes on the road.

When precipitation starts to get heavy, turn on your headlights so you can see and be seen better, even during a day storm. Avoid using your high beams during a night storm because they can cause glare. Use fog lights if you have them.

#### **Some general driving tips:**

- Always be sure to allow for plenty of distance between you and the vehicle ahead of you, and slow down gradually before intersections.
- Use extra caution when approaching curves, hills, before making turns, and when driving from a well-traveled highway to a less-traveled highway.
- Before driving up a snowy or slick hill, build momentum to help you climb, and avoid going down the other side too quickly.
- Be careful on bridges and overpasses—they can be icy even when the rest of the road is wet because the pavement freezes quicker.
- If your car does break down, stay with your car.
- Stay off the roads during bad winter storms whenever possible.

### **Don't Be S.A.D.**

Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.) affects 2-10% of people during the short days of winter. Symptoms are feelings of depression, lethargy, fatigue, cravings for sweets and starches, headaches and sleep problems. To lessen symptoms of S.A.D. walk outside for at least 20 minutes per day between 11:00 am – 1:00 pm. If symptoms persists see a health care provider about light therapy or antidepressant medication. For light therapy you would need to purchase a special high intensity light box (10,000 lux), that screens out damaging UV light. To be effective you need to sit near the light for 15-30 minutes each morning while you read or eat your breakfast.

Remember that spring will come. After December 21, pay attention to the fact that the days are getting longer each day.