

## The Mindful Path - The Gift of Winter 2022 - Tips To Stay Healthy And Well

Marilyn Halpern  
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"Take a walk outside. It will serve you far more than pacing around in your mind." - Rasheed Ogunlaru

Colorado may be the best place to enjoy the year-round beauty of endless blue skies and sunny days. We often enjoy the favorable conditions to get out and get some fresh air even in the winter months. According to Nature Scared, people who are 65 years old and older can benefit from the restorative qualities of being outdoors. Nature supports mental clarity and well-being along with better health outcomes. In older adults, studies show that physical activity in green spaces can be linked to better moods, decreased chance of depression, reduced stress levels, increased mobility, and improved cognitive function. The following tips can aid in making outdoor adventures sensible and safe.

Layers and gear. A wise Norwegian saying is: "There is no bad weather, only bad clothes!" Think in terms of dressing from head to toe. Your gear might include hats, earmuffs, scarves, thermal underwear, gloves, a vented coat and sturdy, non-slip shoes or boots. Layers not only prevents cold from seeping in but also retains heat better. A vented jacket and layers also allow you to modulate your body heat comfortably if you get too warm. December is the perfect month to inventory your winter gear and create a wish list of what you'd like to receive as a gift or give yourself. When venturing out, don't forget your sunglasses, lip balm and sunscreen.

Drink up. According to the Cleveland Clinic, the winter months can actually be worse for dehydration in older adults, as sweat evaporates more rapidly in the cold, dry air and there is fluid loss just through the process of breathing. In general, the problem of dehydration is significant because as we age the sense of thirst diminishes. When exploring outdoors, take along a thermos of hot tea, cocoa, cider, or coffee. If your walk is on the shorter side, be sure to top off your adventure with your favorite beverage, clear broth or water when you return indoors.

A snowy wonderland. Oftentimes the sun will clear paths to make outdoor walks enjoyable. The featured photo this month is of the Denver Highland Canal after our first snow. Be on the lookout for opportunities to trudge in green spaces. When walking in the winter, be careful of snowy patches and black ice.

Timing is everything. Plan your outing so you don't get too cold. Older adults are susceptible to

hypothermia because conditions like diabetes, thyroid disease, arthritis, cognitive decline, Parkinson's disease, and some medications can negatively impact body heat retention. Hypothermia happens when the body temperature gets too low. Check the temperature and wind chill to gauge the length of time to safely stay outside.

Play it safe. If the weather outside is frightful, stay indoors. Consider outsourcing snow removal. Shoveling snow should be considered a high-intensity exercise that can be a tremendous strain on your heart and lungs. During inclement weather, consider having a dog walker brave the hazardous conditions and walk your dog. Postpone or cancel plans in snowy and icy conditions. "Unfortunately, falls are a common occurrence for senior citizens, especially during the winter months," says Dr. Stanley Wang, a physician at Stanford Hospital in Palo Alto, California. Often these falls cause major injuries such as hip and wrist fractures, head trauma and major lacerations. Always think safety first.

Healthy Aging offers a printable PDF offering more winter safety tips at [www.healthinaging.org/tools-and-tips/tip-sheet-winter-safety-older-adults](http://www.healthinaging.org/tools-and-tips/tip-sheet-winter-safety-older-adults)

Enjoy the stark beauty of Denver in winter. If you are unable to get outdoors, make your way to sunny windows to enjoy the warmth of the sun and the frosty beauty. Have a beautiful holiday season filled with a spark of deep appreciation for the splendor of Colorado in winter.

In memory of Irene Belarski (1929-2022) a visionary who enjoyed hiking and skiing well into her 80's.

Marilyn Halpern is the founder and executive director of Aspen Care Services. This locally owned business provides medical power of attorney, care management and professional guardianship services in the Denver Metro area. For more information visit - [www.aspencareservices.com](http://www.aspencareservices.com).

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*Photo credit: Roland Halpern*



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## Tip Sheet: Winter Safety For Older Adults

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**Baby, It's Cold Outside!** When the temperature drops, older adults run a higher risk of health problems and injuries related to the weather, including hypothermia, frostbite, and falls in ice and snow. Like most things in life, it is better to be prepared. Here are a few precautions everyone should take, especially older adults, during the winter.

Need a PDF?

[Tip Sheet: Winter Safety for Older Adults](#)

### Hypothermia

Hypothermia occurs when your body temperature drops to a dangerous level. Your body temperature can drop when you are out in the cold for an extended time because it begins to lose heat quickly. Older adults are at an increased risk of hypothermia due to changes that happen to your body with aging.

**Warning Signs:** cold skin that is pale or ashy; feeling very tired, confused and sleepy; feeling weak; problems walking; slowed breathing or heart rate. Call 911 if you think you or someone else has hypothermia.

**Note: Shivering is not a reliable warning sign because older people tend to shiver less or not at all when their body temperature drops.**

### Precautions to Take

- Stay indoors (or don't stay outside for very long).
- Keep indoor temperature at 65 degrees or warmer.
- Stay dry because wet clothing chills your body more quickly.
- Dress smart – protect your lungs from cold air. Layer up! Wearing 2 or 3 thinner layers of loose-fitting clothing is warmer than a single layer of thick clothing. Think about getting your thermals!
- Essential winter wear: hats, gloves (or preferably mittens), winter coat, boots, and a scarf to cover your mouth and nose.

### Frostbite

Frostbite occurs when your body experiences damage to the skin that can go all the way down to the bone. Not surprisingly, extreme cold can cause frostbite. It is most likely to occur on body parts farthest away from your heart. Common places include your nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, and toes. In severe cases, frostbite can result in loss of limbs. People with heart disease and other circulation problems are at a higher risk.

**Cover up!** All parts of your body should be covered when you go out in the cold. If your skin turns red or dark or starts hurting, go inside right away.

**Know the warning signs of frostbite:** skin that's white or ashy or grayish-yellow; skin that feels hard or waxy; numbness. If

you think you or someone else has frostbite, call for medical help immediately.

**If frostbite occurs**, run the affected area under warm (not hot) water.

## Injury While Shoveling Snow

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It's one of the evils of winter – snow shoveling. If you choose to shovel, take some precautions. Remember, when it's cold outside, your heart works double time to keep you warm. Strenuous activities like shoveling snow may put too much strain on your heart, especially if you have heart disease. Shoveling can also be dangerous if you have problems with balance or have “thin bones” (osteoporosis).

**Ask your healthcare provider** whether shoveling or other work in the snow is safe for you.

## Falls

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It is easy to slip and fall in the winter, especially in icy and snowy conditions.

### Precautions to Take

- Make sure steps and walkways are clear before you walk. Be especially careful if you see wet pavements that could be iced over.
- Clear away snow and salt your walkways at home, or hire someone to do it.
- Wear boots with non-skid soles – this will prevent you from slipping.
- If you use a cane, replace the rubber tip before it is worn smooth.
- Consider an ice pick-like attachment that fits onto the end of the cane for additional traction.

## Fires and Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

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During the winter months, it is common to use the fireplace or other heating sources, such as natural gas, kerosene, and other fuels. Unless fireplaces, wood and gas stoves and gas appliances are properly vented, cleaned, and used, they can leak dangerous amounts of carbon monoxide—a deadly gas that you cannot see or smell. These and other appliances, such as space heaters, can also be fire hazards.

### Warning Signs

- Headache
- Weakness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Blurred vision
- Loss of consciousness

**If you think you may have carbon monoxide poisoning, get into fresh air and get medical care immediately.**

### Precautions to Take

- Call an inspector to have your chimneys and flues inspected – preferred annually.
- Open a window (when using a kerosene stove) – just a crack will do.
- Place smoke detectors and battery-operated carbon monoxide detectors in strategic places – especially in areas where you use fireplaces, wood stoves, or kerosene heaters.
- Make sure space heaters are at least 3 feet away from anything that might catch fire, such as curtains, bedding, and

furniture.

- Never try to heat your home using a gas stove, charcoal grill, or other stoves not made for home heating.

**If there is a fire, don't try to put it out. Leave the house and call 911.**

## Accidents While Driving

Adults 65 and older are involved in more car crashes per mile driven than those in nearly all other age groups. Winter is an especially important time to be vigilant when driving because road conditions and weather may not be optimal.

### Precautions to Take

- “Winterize” your car before the bad weather hits! This means having the antifreeze, tires, and windshield wipers checked and changed if necessary.
- Remember your cell phone when you drive in bad weather, and always let someone know where you are going and when you should be expected back.
- Avoid driving on icy roads, and be especially careful driving on overpasses or bridges. Consider alternate routes, even if it means driving a longer distance, if the more direct route is less safe. Often bigger roads are cleared of snow better than smaller roads.
- Stock your car with basic emergency supplies such as:
  - First aid kit
  - Blankets
  - Extra warm clothes
  - Booster cables
  - Windshield scraper
  - Shovel
  - Rock salt or a bag of sand or cat litter (in case your wheels get stuck)
  - Water and dried food or canned food (with can opener!)
  - Flashlight
  - Map (if traveling in new areas)

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40 Fulton St., Suite 809  
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