

Winter Safety

Winter is upon us, and with it came an unexpected early snowfall and more unpredictable weather. Regardless, if you welcomed the fluffy white stuff or not it is now upon us. It is more important to be aware of your surroundings, weather and your personal safety. Often it can involve making decisions about when to go out, what to wear, or activities that you chose to do.

As you age, you become more at risk for frostbite and hypothermia because of decreased circulation. Frostbite can affect extremities such as ears, nose, chin, fingers, toes and cheeks. One of the signs is that your skin feels hard or waxy. The American Geriatrics Society has found that older adults lose their body heat faster and tend to produce less body heat than younger adults and so are more at risk to have hypothermia. Some of the symptoms of hypothermia is burning, numbness, tingling, and shivering. Your skin is cold and looks pale and you may become tired and confused.

Here are some safety tips to staying safe this winter.

It is important to dress for being outdoors in the cold including wearing 2 – 3 layers of loose fitting clothing, wearing mittens instead of gloves, hat and a scarf over your mouth. If it's windy, you might want to consider wearing something on the outside that is wind proof. Wear non-slip boots and shoes. If you aren't sure if they are non-slip, put them out on your front step or balcony for a few hours. If the soles become hard, they likely are made of a slippery material. (not sure about this). Couldn't we just say, well insulated, waterproof, lightweight with good tread.

Staying active throughout the winter is important but try to do it with your safety in mind. This is a personal decision. However the weather and outside conditions should be considered. A fresh snow fall, a windy day, icy, slippery surfaces can create added risks for a fall. Being aware of your surroundings, taking your time and using such things as walking poles or a cane can help to stabilize you and provide that support that you need. . Avoid carrying heavy packages to help keep you balanced and try to keep your hands free to catch yourself if you fall.

If you chose to be outdoors, there are trails in Saskatoon that are cleared of snow including the Meewasin trail. It can be bright out there, wearing UVA eye protection can aide you in knowing where to step.

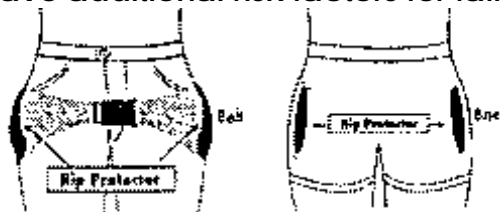
There are many indoor activities that you can do; including using the walking paths at the Field House or Shaw Center, walking at a mall, aqua size programs, or other learn to classes. The key is to stay active.

Make sure that you continue to eat healthy, drink enough fluids and limit alcohol use to maintain your healthy lifestyle.

You may want to consider adding a delivery service or snow removal business to your phone list for times that it may not be safe to venture out. Accept help from family, friends or neighbours, or help each other. A few simple changes this winter can keep you safe.

Consider assistive devices

- Ice grippers can help traction on hard packed snowy surfaces. Be careful! They can become dangerous and slippery, and must be removed before walking on surfaces like stone, tiles, ceramic or laminate floors. Be sure you can remove or attach them with ease before purchasing and that you have a place to sit to remove them.
- Use a cane or walking poles for balance and a ice pick on the tip. Flip up the pick when you are indoors as it will slip on hard surfaces. Use as recommended or speak to a health professional on how to use.
- Wear hip protectors: a lightweight undergarment that shields the hips from a fracture in the event you fall. These are recommended for those that have additional risk factors for falling.



There are other winter safety tips in the Positive Aging Calendar and additional resources for help in your home in the SCOA directory. For your free copy, contact SCOA.