

Falls during winter weather can lead to many types of injuries such as fractures of the wrists, legs, ankles and hip, as well as cause potential head neck or brain injuries. It is nearly impossible to completely avoid ice and snow this time of year, but there are some steps that you can take to help reduce your risk of falling.

- Be aware of your surroundings. Avoid distractions such as the cell phone and take time to pay attention to the surfaces that you are walking on or getting ready to walk on.
- Try to pick areas that are well lit when you are parking and walking, so that you can see any ice that is in your path, especially so that you can see black ice.
- Choose walkways that are well-cleared, even if that is not the most direct and convenient route.
- Use salt or sand on icy walkways.
- When walking on ice, walk with short, shuffling steps and keep feet as flat as possible (walk like a penguin).
- If there is something sturdy close by, use it to help guide your balance. For example, use a handrail if it's available. Or, as you are getting out of your car in an icy parking lot, hold onto the car to help with balance.
- When you are getting out of your car in an icy or potentially icy area, place both feet firmly on the ground before getting up to help with balance.
- Avoid carrying heavy bags that may throw off your center of gravity. Keep your torso balanced and straight over your feet.
- Keep your hands out of your pockets. You can help break your fall with your hands free if you do start to slip and by placing your arms out to your side can help to maintain your balance.
- When transitioning from the bright outdoor environment to indoor areas, stop briefly to allow your vision to catch up with the change in lighting, in order to recognize hazards ahead.
- Don't hurry! Take your time while walking over ice and snow.
- Be sure to wear good shoes with appropriate traction. Rubber-soled shoes are best. You can also use various types of traction devices that slip over the shoes.

When You Get Home

Once you are home, don't forget to take off your snowy or wet shoes as soon as possible to avoid causing wet floors that could lead to a fall in the home. Dry any wet spots as soon as possible.

Special Circumstances

Take extra precautions if you:

- are over 65 years of age
- take 4 or more medications
- have had a fall in the last six months
- use a cane or a walker
- have difficulty with balance
- have risks that could make a fall more serious, such as osteoporosis
- are taking blood thinners

These can not only increase your risk of a fall, but also increase risk of a serious event if you do fall. Due to that, avoid icy conditions as much as possible. On snowy, icy days, cancel non-essential appointments and activities. Try to get shopping and errands done before a storm or hazardous weather comes. Keep exercise indoors for a few days as needed. When you do need to go out, take your time and be as careful as possible. Activate the buddy system as well - always make sure someone knows you're 'on the move' and check-in with that person when you arrive and depart. If they do not hear from you, then they will be alerted to something potentially going wrong and can intervene, if needed. Make sure if you have a mobile phone available, you keep it on your person. In the event of a fall, you will have the resource to notify emergency personnel.