



avoid falls in winter

It is always important to take precautions to avoid falls, but especially during the icy, slippery winter months. Falls are particularly dangerous for seniors who are more prone to falls due to slower reflexes, which make it difficult to regain balance. Falls can lead to bone fractures, traumatic brain injuries and even injury deaths. For those over the age of 65, slip and fall accidents are the leading cause of injury-related deaths in the United States.

“Fortunately, most falls are preventable and seniors should take extra precautions when going outside in the ice and snow to avoid slipping and falling,” says Suzi Klyber, an Occupational Therapist with the THE MEDICAL TEAM. Suzi is one of many dedicated therapists who work with seniors in their homes to help them develop ways to modify or adapt activities. To make winter less perilous when leaving home, Suzi suggests that seniors follow these tips:

Choose carefully to go outside based on the weather and your abilities. Avoid going out when fatigued since fatigue increases the chance of falling.

Be equipped. Always use your walking device and wear appropriate winter footwear. Wear a mask if you have respiratory problems, especially if windy. Cold and wind can lead to chest tightness and shortness of breath. Being out of breath can result in decreased balance. If you fall, it can be hard to get up. Carry a cell phone so you can contact someone in case of an emergency.

Be alert to difficult conditions. Go

slowly to ensure greater safety. Being a little late is better than rushing and causing a fall. Check railings to make sure they are sturdy and appropriately placed. Beware of slopes. Know that when the sun is out, you may experience snow blindness. Watch out for black ice, especially at night when headlights may reflect off ice and snow.

Rely on others. Use delivery services from pharmacies or grocery stores so you can avoid going out in icy conditions. If you must walk across an icy sidewalk or parking lot, try to find a steady arm to lean on.

Have a plan. When you are going out, ask yourself, “If I slipped and fell here, what would I do?”

Most importantly, keep stretching and exercising. “Since balance and strength are an important element of steadying yourself if you slip, seniors should be sure to continue their exercise routines throughout the winter months,” says Suzi Klyber, OT/L. There are many exercises that can be done at home when the weather is too cold or icy to exercise outdoors. Start with a few repetitions of each of the following exercises and build up gradually, but be sure to check with your physician before beginning any new exercise routine.

For Improved Flexibility: Circle your arms slowly to stretch the upper body. Sit down and extend your knee straight out. Pump your ankle up and down to stretch leg muscles. Repeat on the other leg.

To Increase Strength: Stand at the kitchen counter and do small knee bends. Do sit-to-



In the wintertime, it is important to ensure your safety by being more alert to difficult conditions and having a plan in case a fall may occur.

stand exercises by simply sitting down then standing up. From a standing position, go up on your toes, then down again. March on the spot. Do side leg raises while standing at the kitchen counter.

For Better Balance: Balance on one leg (do this near something you can grab onto). Tap step by moving your right foot forward, to the side, to a position behind you, and then back to starting position. Do the same with left.

For Increased Endurance: Keep walking! Apartment hallways and indoor shopping malls are excellent places for walking. Do arm exercises at shoulder height or above in order to challenge your heart and lungs.

With the help of these fall prevention and exercise tips, active seniors don't have to stay cooped up indoors all winter and can maintain their independent and healthy lifestyle to the greatest extent possible. **GRL**

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