



Patient Handout: Tips to Stay Fall Free in Winter

It only takes a split second to fall, but here are some tips to help you from falling.

Choose your footwear carefully

- Check your traction: wear boots and shoes with a good grip.
- Consider using an anti-slip shoe traction device or ice cleats on your shoes. Even though you have these devices on, you still need to avoid icy and slippery surfaces. Always take off these grips or cleats when indoors because they may make you slip on indoor flooring.

Plan ahead

- Make sure you have enough time to get where you're going. Your chances of falling increase when you're running late and rushing.
- Be aware of winter weather conditions.
- Let people know your plans and take a cell phone or whistle with you or wear an alert system when you leave your house.
- If you fall, have someone that can assist you in getting help as quickly as possible, this may even save your life.

Use caution as you walk

- Walk like a penguin to prevent falls on snow and ice
 - Walking like a penguin: means moving slowly and taking very small steps.
 - Keep your feet pointed outward to allow for wider base of support and your knees slightly bent and relaxed to lower your center of gravity.
 - Your hands should be kept out to your side and out of your pockets for balance like a penguin's wings. Wear gloves so you can keep your hands out of your pockets.
 - Keep your head up and don't lean forward.
 - See the video link from Alberta Health Services for more information: [Walk Like a Penguin](#)
- Walk on cleared walkways. Use the safest route to your location and the safest route into the building.
- Find a clear path around snow or ice when you can.
- Be careful of hidden ice and dark areas on pavement as they can be slippery and dangerous. Assume all wet, dark areas on pavement may be slippery or icy. Walk around them if you can.
- Use a backpack, making sure that it fits, to keep your hands free. Avoid carrying anything heavy that may make you lose your balance or that blocks your view as you walk.
- If you use a cane, buy and attach an ice tip.
- Avoid texting or talking on your phone and walking at the same time.
- Be careful getting on or off a bus as the steps or the road may be slippery. Use the front door to exit, so the driver can lower the bus for a safer exit.
- Be careful getting in and out of your car. Hold onto your car door or car as you get out to give yourself extra support.
- Use Nordic poles if recommended to you by a healthcare professional. For some people, Nordic poles may not be appropriate.

Use handrails on stairs and ramps

- If you're walking on a slope where there are no handrails, be extra careful.
- Check your railings and ensure they are sturdy as they may save you from an unexpected fall.

Remove snow as soon as you can from your porch, steps, walkway and driveway

- Keep your salt and shovel indoors to avoid slipping outside.
- Spread sand or grit on your steps and walkways. You could also try carrying a small container of sand or grit to sprinkle on icy or sloped surfaces that you can't walk around.

Stay active

- On especially bad weather days, consider whether you really need to go out or not.
- If ice and snow make it unsafe to exercise outdoors, stay active with an indoor routine that includes strengthening and balance exercises.
- Don't let your fear of falling get in the way of winter outdoor activities. Staying indoors and being inactive can increase your fall risk.

Ask for help

- Most people are willing to help you navigate across a slippery sidewalk or parking lot or to help with snow removal.
- If entrances or sidewalks are not safe, ask people to help remove the snow or use de-icer. Businesses and property managers can help reduce the dangers.
- Plan ahead for snow and icy days.

Adapted from:

1. CARP (Canadian Association for Retired Persons). Farewell to Falls Resource Guide (2019). <https://s3.amazonaws.com/zweb-s3.uploads/carp/2019/11/FarewellToFalls.pdf>
2. Centre for Hip Health and Mobility. Tips for Staying Fall-Free this Winter. <http://www.hiphealth.ca/blog/tips-for-staying-fall-free-this-winter>
3. Fall Risk Management Program, Alberta Health Services. Winter Walking Tips: Lower Your Risk of Falling (2019). <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/winter-walking-tips.aspx>
4. Michigan Government. Winter Fall Prevention & Safety Tips. https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/Winter_Fall_Prevention_494521_7.pdf
5. Osteoporosis Canada. Navigating Winter (2014). https://osteoporosis.ca/wp-content/uploads/COPING_November_20_2014.pdf