

Preventing falls in the winter

Most of us can recall a time when we slipped in the winter snow or on an icy sidewalk. You may have gotten away with just a bruise or a sore spot for a few days.

But, slips and falls can be serious — especially for older adults and those with health problems. In fact, falls are the leading cause of injuries in older adults. Some falls can even be fatal.

Colder temperatures mean slick surfaces — and dangerous falls. Follow these suggestions to help avoid falls in the winter, and share them with the older adults in your life.



Vehicle safety

Getting in and out of a car is a prime time for slips and falls.

- Look at the surface before you step out of your car.
- Keep three or four “points of contact” when getting in and out. This means put both feet on the ground, and have one or two hands on a stable part of the car before you try to move.



Walk safely

People who have a high fall risk may need to avoid walking outdoors when it's icy. But for those who can't avoid walking in the winter weather, follow these tips:

- Get rid of old footwear. Shoes and boots that have worn soles are more likely to lose their grip and slip.
- Wear boots with deep cleats or use ice cleats on the outside of boots. These are available at most sporting goods stores.
- If you use a cane for walking, consider getting an ice grip that attaches to the tip of your cane.
- Wear warm gloves or mittens. Don't keep hands in pockets, as this makes it harder to keep your balance.
- Keep hands free by using a backpack or cross-body purse in place of a handbag.
- When possible, choose surfaces that have been salted and that are in direct sunlight.
- Keep a small bag of kitty litter in your purse or pocket. If a surface looks icy, scatter some of the litter in front of you before walking.
- Don't be afraid to go “off road.” If a sidewalk looks icy, consider walking on the grass next to it. This can work if you can see that the ground doesn't have hazards like holes or uneven surfaces.
- Use ice melting salt or sand on your sidewalks and around entries to your home. Older adults may need a loved one or a neighbor to help apply this every time it snows or gets icy.

Source: National Council on Aging