

Winter Weather Walking and Changing Elevations

What Hazards and Factors Contribute to a Slip, Trip or Fall?

We all recognize that the winter months are especially hazardous due to the presence of ice and snow, but there are many other factors that contribute to slips, trips and falls:

- Loose, irregular surfaces such as gravel, shifting floor tiles and uneven sidewalks, can make it difficult to maintain your footing.
- Oil, grease and other liquids can make walking surfaces extremely slick.
- Stairs present a special challenge, especially those that are taller, shorter, have a smaller tread depth, or are otherwise irregular.
- Obstructed aisles or walkways present tripping hazards or require frequent changes of direction, throwing you off balance.
- Insufficient light can make it difficult to see obstacles and notice changes in the walking surface.
- Shoes with slick soles provide insufficient traction, while platform shoes and high heels increase your vulnerability to uneven surfaces.
- Moving too fast increases the likelihood you will misjudge a step or encounter a hazard before you have a chance to notice it.
- Carrying items can both obstruct your vision and impair your balance.
- Inattention and distraction interfere with your awareness of all of these hazards and increase your risk of injury.

Safety Tips when Walking in Winter Weather

It is recommended to keep these important safety tips in mind:

Adapt Defensive Driving Techniques When Walking

- You can adapt many of the principals of defensive driving and apply them to walking. Being a "defensive walker" can help you safely navigate many of the hazards lurking all around you.
 - ⌚ Scan your "road" for existing and potential hazards. Just as you do when you are driving, be aware of others, expect them to get in your way, and have an out when they do.
 - ⌚ Slow down to negotiate turns, corners, ice, obstacles, limited visibility and heavy traffic.
 - ⌚ Make sure you have adequate "tread." Some experts believe up to half of all slips and falls could be prevented through proper footwear alone.
 - ⌚ Use a detour whenever possible to avoid ice or wet surfaces.
 - ⌚ Realize that there are hazards involved in going "off road." A shortcut across the lawn or through the rocks may not be the best choice.
 - ⌚ Keep your mind focused on what you are doing.
- In cold temperatures, approach with caution and assume that all wet and dark areas on pavements are slippery and icy.
 - ⌚ Dew or water vapor can freeze on cold surfaces, forming an extra-thin, nearly invisible layer of ice that can look like a wet spot on the pavement.

Choosing Appropriate Clothing

- During bad weather, avoid boots or shoes with smooth soles and heels, such as plastic and leather soles. Instead, wear shoes or boots that provide traction on snow and ice; boots made of non-slip rubber or neoprene with grooved soles are best.
- Wear a heavy, bulky coat that will cushion you if you should fall.
- Keep warm, but make sure you can hear what's going on around you.
- During the day, wear sunglasses to help you see better and avoid hazards.
- Whatever you wear, make sure it doesn't block your vision or make it hard for you to hear traffic.

Walk Like a Penguin

- When encountering an ice or snow covered walking surface, use this method to reduce the risk of a slip or fall:
 - ⌚ Point your feet out slightly like a penguin.
 - Spreading your feet out slightly while walking on ice increases your center of gravity.
 - ⌚ Bend slightly and walk flat-footed with your center of gravity directly over the feet as much as possible.
 - ⌚ Extend your arms out to your sides to maintain balance. Beware if you are carrying a load — your sense of balance will be off.
 - If you must carry a load, try not to carry too much; leave your hands and arms free to balance yourself.
 - ⌚ Keep your hands out of your pockets. Hands in your pockets while walking decreases your center of gravity and balance. If you start to slip, you can help break your fall if your hands are free.
 - ⌚ Watch where you are stepping and GO S-L-O-W-L-Y. This will help your reaction time to changes in traction.
 - ⌚ Take short steps or shuffle for stability. It also helps to stop occasionally to break momentum.

When Changing Elevations or Moving in or out of Vehicles

- When walking on steps use the hand railings and plant your feet firmly on each step.
- Use special care when entering and exiting vehicles.
 - ⌚ Tap/rub your foot on the ground to determine if there is ice present.
 - ⌚ Support yourself by maintaining contact with a secure hand-hold when moving on or off, in or out of vehicles.