



Winter Weather Safety for Seniors

Not all seniors are lucky enough to spend their long cold winters in sunny locals such as Hawaii, Florida or Arizona. If you're spending this winter in an area that's prone to harsh winter weather, you might find that getting through the cold is a bit more challenging than it used to be. If so, then you'll appreciate these tips for staying happy and healthy until the first sprouts of spring emerge.

Safety Always

Independent living doesn't mean that you have to "go at it alone" so don't be afraid to ask children, relatives and neighbors for help. Most will be more than willing to lend a hand and you should arrange for someone to look in on you often.

If you find that lifting bags of salt or shovelfuls of snow is something you're struggling with, don't attempt it. Keeping your sidewalks free of snow and ice is hard work and can be dangerous. If you can't find anyone who can help and strike out on your own, make sure to take your time on these tasks to avoid overexerting your heart.

A better solution might be to hire someone. Start asking neighborhood teen-agers or their parents if they're looking to make some extra money and you'll likely find a few takers. If not, look on your local Craigs List (www.craigslist.com) or in the classified sections of local papers and on bulletin boards around town for the names of people you can hire.

Stay warm

As you know, dressing in layers offers protection from the harsh cold when you venture outside in the winter. Just be sure to cover all exposed skin including the head, face, earlobes, neck and hands. Remember to limit your time outdoors, and to keep dry when you are outside for extended periods of time.

When inside, take extra care when using traditional fireplaces, wood burning stoves and space heaters as there is a potential for accidental fires and or carbon monoxide poisoning if they are not working properly. It's a safe practice to place new batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors at the onset of cold weather.

You can conserve interior heat by keeping windows and doors to rooms you aren't using closed. You can also cover windows with draperies, place towels along cracks at bottom of doors. And always have plenty of dry wood inside in case you can't get out.

Eating Right

It's tempting to load up on high-fat foods, but with a bit of planning and effort, you can keep eating right throughout winter. Vegetable-laden stews and soups made with reduced sodium broths can warm you on a cold day and provide your body with beneficial nutrients. Limit consumption of alcohol, caffeine and cigarette tobacco as they decrease the body's ability to conserve heat.

Staying active

You probably won't be doing many outdoor activities during this time of year but that does not mean you should become a hermit. As often as possible, continue going to church, volunteering, and getting together with friends and family. Also consider signing up for any of the activities that interest you that you see posted at community centers, health centers, your church and other locations offering senior services.