

# Weather Safety for Older Adults

## Winter Fall Risks

Severe winter weather and conditions can increase your risk of falling. Falls are not a normal part of aging, but as we age, we may be more susceptible to serious injury from a fall. Falls are the number one cause of injuries leading to ER visits, hospital stays and deaths in Ohioans age 65 and older. However, most falls can be prevented when you understand your risks and take steps to remove or avoid hazards.

- **Ice and snow** – The most obvious threat for falls during the winter is ice and snow.
  - Wear boots and shoes that fit properly and have soles with good traction.
  - Slow down and give yourself extra time to get where you're going.
  - Make sure steps leading into your home have sturdy handrails that can support you if you slip.
  - Watch for slippery surfaces ahead of you. Keep your head up and use your eyes to look down.
  - Don't try to walk in more than an inch of snow. Deeper accumulations can cause you to trip.
  - When in doubt, ask for help.
- **Reduced activity** – Your body needs exercise year-round to prevent falls. Ask your doctor or physical therapist about indoor exercises that can help you build and maintain balance, strength and stamina when you can't venture out.
- **Tripping hazards** – Things we do to keep our homes warm in winter can create tripping hazards. Keep space heaters, cords and blankets out of walkways. If you must use throw rugs on cold floors, secure them to the floor with tape.
- **Winter clothing** – Coats, gloves, hats and other winter clothing are designed to keep us warm, but items that are bulky, don't fit well or could catch on objects can increase your risk of falling.
- **Power outages** – Ice and snow can cause the power to go out, which can limit your ability to see obstacles.
- **Less sunlight** – Invest in extra lamps, nightlights and exterior pathway lights to make sure you can always see where you are walking, especially around doorways and stairs. Use the highest-wattage bulbs recommended for your fixtures.

## Check on your neighbors

For a variety of reasons, older friends and relatives may have a harder time adjusting during extreme conditions than younger people do. If severe weather is forecasted or has just occurred, check in on older friends and family members to ensure that they are okay and that they have the resources they need to stay safe and healthy.

## Do a risk assessment:

- Do they need medical attention?
- Do they have safe food and water?
- Is the temperature in their home comfortable?
- Who will they call if they need help?



STEADY U Ohio is a statewide initiative to prevent falls among older adults. Take a falls risk self-assessment, sign up for news and resources, interact on Facebook and Twitter and get a variety of falls-prevention tips.

[www.steadyu.ohio.gov](http://www.steadyu.ohio.gov)