

Preparing Your Aging Loved One for Winter



A Winter Survival Guide for Seniors



PRESBYTERIAN
SENIOR LIVING

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Preparing your elderly loved one for winter takes a lot of preparation, thought and understanding the many physical and emotional needs unique to senior citizens. To help ensure your parent, grandparent or elderly loved one remains safe, happy and warm this winter, we've prepared this handy e-book filled with tips, advice and ideas that can make winter a less uncomfortable and hazardous season.



Pre-Winter Home Maintenance

- ✔ Seal windows and doors with caulking, weather-stripping or plastic window treatments that stop drafts from entering the home.
- ✔ Wrap insulation or electrical heating tape around exposed pipes to prevent pipes from freezing.
- ✔ Turn off exterior faucets and drain your loved one's lawn irrigation system.
- ✔ Have your loved one's heating system checked by an HVAC technician. Keep four or five furnace filters on hand so they can be changed once a month.
- ✔ Chimneys and fireplaces also need preventive maintenance. Flues should open and close completely and chimneys need cleaned thoroughly. Repair open mortar joints to reduce the risk of fire behind the wall of a fireplace.
- ✔ Reverse the direction of ceiling fans if the fans have reverse switches. Blades moving in a clockwise direction create an updraft that pushes down heated air and helps keep rooms warmer.
- ✔ Check the roof for missing, loose or damaged shingles and clean the gutters.

Pre-Winter Home Maintenance (Cont'd)

- ✔ Make sure to test your loved one's sump pump to ensure it's working properly.
- ✔ Put new batteries in smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors
- ✔ Place two snow shovels and a metal garbage can full of sidewalk salt (with a scoop) next to your loved one's front door.
- ✔ Cover window air conditioners or better yet, remove and store them properly.
- ✔ Make sure your loved one's house number is immediately and plainly visible to emergency or fire technicians.

Always remember to check in on your loved one if they live alone, especially during stormy periods.

As we've seen in past years, snow can lead to widespread loss of electricity, impassable roads, and expensive property damages. Since they may not have everything on hand, make a special trip to bring them supplies, comfort, and food before storms.





Preparing for Bad Weather and Loss of Electricity

- ✓ Have plenty of new batteries available (all sizes). If you aren't sure how old a battery is, throw it out.
- ✓ Stock one kitchen cabinet with flashlights, one lantern-style light, a battery-powered radio, hand and feet warmers, mittens and hats with earflaps.
- ✓ Stock another cabinet with non-perishable food items such as crackers, peanut butter, trail mix, individual boxes of cereal, dried fruit snacks, powdered milk and pop-top canned chicken or tuna. These items are also easy to open and do not require the use of a can opener.
- ✓ Keep at least two gallons of water in the refrigerator at all times. If possible, put a small bag of ice in your loved one's freezer for extra water security.
- ✓ Medicine cabinets should also be well-stocked with antacids, anti-diarrhea, laxatives, moisturizing eye drops, antibiotic ointment, aspirin/ibuprofen, sinus/cold pills and bandages.
- ✓ Make sure seniors have an ample supply of their prescription drugs on hand. Some drugstores are able to arrange regularly scheduled medications at little or no charge.





Staying Warm Inside and Outside During Winter

Seniors are much more susceptible to suffering hypothermia because of their thin skin and slower metabolism, which makes it difficult for their bodies to maintain a normal temperature. Additionally, they are often taking medications that affect their ability to recognize signs of pre-hypothermia and hypothermia.



Shivering uncontrollably, feeling unusually drowsy or tired and having short-term memory problems may indicate possible hypothermia.

To keep your loved one warm inside their home:

- ✔ Tell them **not** to turn the thermostat below 70 degrees. Trying to save a few dollars on their heating bill may cost them more if they develop hypothermia and must spend a few days in the hospital.

Staying Warm Inside and Outside During Winter (Cont'd)

- ✔ Make sure they have plenty of extra sweaters and bathrobes that aren't too thick. Dressing in layers rather than wearing just one heavy sweater or robe will keep your loved one warmer inside their home.
- ✔ Advise your loved one to avoid drinking alcohol if they feel "chilly". Contrary to what many people believe, drinking alcohol does not warm you up. In fact, it can significantly lower your body temperature and make it harder to detect hypothermia.

To keep your loved one warm outside their home:

- ✔ Make sure they understand how important it is to wear layers of clothing when venturing outside. Ears, heads and faces should be covered if the temperature is below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Thick socks and nonslip, well-insulated shoes should be worn as well.
- ✔ Tell your loved one to wear a watch if they go outside and to check their watch frequently. Regardless of the temperature, they should go inside every 10 to 15 minutes to warm up and rest.
- ✔ Consider enrolling your loved one in a medical alert system that can be worn conveniently as a necklace or bracelet.



Preventing Falls During Winter

Nearly one-third of seniors over 60 suffer at least one or two falls in their lifetime that results in a fracture, break, head trauma or severe bruising. Elderly people are particularly susceptible to slipping and falling in winter, whether due to ice/snow-covered sidewalks, feeling unbalanced because of wearing heavy clothing or taking more medications in the winter.

Reduce the risk of your senior loved one falling by:

- ✓ Making sure to always throw rock salt, calcium chloride, or another type of de-icer on their porches and sidewalks, and keep a supply on hand
- ✓ Ensuring they have the best vision possible by getting their eyes checked just before winter (in case they need a new prescription)
- ✓ Installing railings on both sides of porch steps
- ✓ Repairing porch steps if they are crumbling, cracked or wobbly
- ✓ Giving your loved one rough-treaded shoes with neoprene or rubber soles to reduce slipping risks

Preventing Falls During Winter

- ✔ Placing heavy, deeply grooved rubber mats at the front and back doors (grooves make it easier to scrape chunked snow and ice off shoe bottoms)
- ✔ Teaching them how to “walk” on snow and ice to reduce the risk of falling. For example, if they must walk on snow, show them how to “shuffle” (like taking baby steps) instead of taking normal strides. Slowly moving feet apart just a few inches at a time and bending their knees as they walk provides them with much better stability and balance than walking normally on slippery surfaces.
- ✔ Hiring someone you can depend on who will shovel your loved one’s sidewalks and driveway all winter





Preparing a Senior's Automobile for Winter

Seniors treasure their independence and genuinely dislike bothering others to do errands for them. If you have an elderly loved one who still drives, here are some things you can do to make sure they stay safe while in their car:

- ✔ Get their car properly winterized—oil changed, fluids checked, new battery, tires inflated to correct levels (tires should have good tread on them) and windshield fluid reservoir filled.
- ✔ Put 2 small ice scrapers and 1 larger scraper with brushes in their car.
- ✔ Pack an emergency vehicle kit in a child-sized backpack to be kept in the car. Include these items in the backpack: two blankets, extra mittens, flashlight and extra batteries, energy/granola bars, two bottles of water, several hand warmers and five emergency roadside flares.

Preparing a Senior's Automobile for Winter (Cont'd)

Tell your loved one to make sure their cell phone is fully charged before venturing out in extreme cold or snow. Show them how to use a vehicle cell phone charger that plugs into most newer cars and can charge phones using battery power. Of course, the soundest advice you can give your senior family member is to simply remain indoors when the weather makes it dangerous to drive.



Transporting Your Loved One Safely

Many seniors won't be able to drive, and they should only drive as a last resort, and never alone. Let a friend or relative know when and where you're going, and check in to make sure that you get there without any issues.

- ✔ Prepare your car instead (use the tips above), pick them up, and bring them where they have to go, it's a small price for a lot of peace and mind and safety.
- ✔ Seniors that have trouble walking should back into seats in cars. Have them turn their walker so they move into seats rear first.



Helping Seniors Fight Depression and Isolation in Winter

Winter can be a depressing time for many people but widows and widowers living alone are especially susceptible to suffering loneliness, isolation and depression when they are homebound. Here are some tips that can help your loved one remain in contact with other people during the long, dark days of winter:

- ✓ Depending on the physical abilities of your loved one, you might consider adopting a pet from your local animal shelter for them to take care of and love. Animal shelters have many aging pets because owners have passed away or can no longer take care of them.
- ✓ According to several research studies, seniors who spent time online experience less depression and a better sense of belonging. Skype and Facetime makes it possible for seniors to interact with family members who live hundreds of miles away. Take the time to show your senior loved one how video conferencing works and assist them in connecting online with family members the first few times.

Helping Seniors Fight Depression and Isolation in Winter (Cont'd)

- ✔ Seniors living alone are at a higher risk of suffering malnutrition during winter. Not eating right can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and depression by disrupting brain chemistry and sleep patterns. Find out if your area has a Meals on Wheels or other food deliver service that can ensure your loved one has good, healthy food to eat throughout winter.

The time and effort you put into preparing your loved one's home, vehicle, and surrounding areas for the cold winter months will be well spent if you follow these guidelines. While the best solution is to stay warm by remaining inside, not everyone will want to do so, and lack of movement can lead to circulatory and muscle problems. With the proper preparations and procedures, there is no reason that your loved one cannot enjoy the winter and the holidays safely and warmly.

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