



HEALTH AWARENESS

Winter Weather And Your Health

(NAPSA)—Now that the winter months are upon us, it's important to know the potential health problems facing people with cardiovascular disease, including overexertion, hypothermia, the flu and complications from over-the-counter (OTC) medications.

Many people aren't used to the physical stress of outdoor activities and don't know the dangers of being outdoors in cold weather. While anyone who is outdoors in cold weather should avoid sudden exertion such as lifting a heavy shovel full of snow, it's even more important for people with cardiovascular disease. Even walking through heavy, wet snow or snowdrifts can strain a person's heart.

Winter sports enthusiasts who don't take precautions can suffer from hypothermia. Hypothermia occurs when your body can't produce enough energy to keep your internal temperature warm enough, and it falls below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. It can kill you. Heart failure causes most deaths among hypothermia victims. Symptoms include:

- Lack of coordination
- Mental confusion
- Slowed reactions
- Shivering
- Sleepiness.

Cold-weather months usually bring more cases of the flu, which is more common among people with cardiovascular disease than any other chronic condition. Heart patients are encouraged to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Even if they can't get shots early in the flu season, it's important to remember that flu shots can be beneficial as late as January. Flu season often lasts well into March.

Many people use a decongestant when fighting off a cold or the



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flu. People with high blood pressure should be aware that decongestants may raise blood pressure or interfere with the effectiveness of prescribed blood pressure medications. Many over-the-counter cold and flu preparations contain decongestants such as:

- Ephedrine
- Levmetamfetamine
- Naphazoline
- Oxymetazoline
- Phenylephrine
- Phenylpropanolamine
- Propylhexedrine
- Pseudoephedrine
- Synephrine
- Tetrahydrozoline.

Always read the labels on all OTC medications, especially if you have blood pressure of 120/80 mm Hg or greater. If you have high blood pressure—and especially if you are on prescription medication—consult your health care professional before taking any over-the-counter medications or supplements.

For more information about cardiovascular disease and cold weather, visit www.heart.org/coldweather. For more information on high blood pressure, visit www.heart.org/hbp. Follow the American Heart Association on Facebook (HBPescapes) or Twitter (@AMHeartHighBP).