

# Ten Tips To Help You Stay Safe

(NAPSA)—Even when the temperature drops, there are steps you can take to keep your safety up and your risk of injuries due to cold-weather hazards down. That can be wise, since experts say one in three people 65 years of age and older experience falls each year.

To protect yourself and your loved ones, consider these tips:

- **Shovel safely**—Before you tackle the snow, make sure you're in good physical health. Check with your doctor before engaging in such a strenuous activity. If you are up to the challenge, pace yourself and listen to your body. If your back hurts, take a break. Always lift with your legs and use a snowblower to lighten the load, if possible. If you must lift the snow, scoop small amounts into the shovel and walk to where you want to dump it. Holding a shovelful of snow with your arms outstretched puts too much weight on your spine. It's not wise to remove deep snow all at once. Instead, shovel an inch or two at a time and never throw snow over your shoulder.

- **Get your muscles feeling "cozy"**—Take some time to stretch to prepare your body, since warm muscles work better. If possible, wait until the afternoon before engaging in any outdoor activity. Many disc injuries occur in the morning, when there is increased fluid pressure in the disc.

- **Bundle up**—Light, layered, water-repellent clothing provides both ventilation and insulation. It is also important to wear an appropriate head covering, mittens or gloves and thick, warm socks.

- **Warm up to working out**—



Exercise helps improve strength, coordination and balance, which can not only help prevent falls, but in the event of an injury, can help you bounce back faster.

- **Drink your hot cocoa**—Don't forget your calcium. This important nutrient helps build strong bones and prevents osteoporosis. That can minimize the damage from a fall and aid in recovery.

- **Boots are better**—Shoes with heels and no traction make it difficult to keep your balance. Walking on snow or ice is especially treacherous, so a pair of well-insulated boots with good rubber treads is essential. Keeping a pair of rubber overshoes with good treads that fit over your street shoes is also a good safety precaution.

- **Walking in a winter wonderland**—On ice or snow, take short steps and stroll at a slower pace so you can react quickly to a change in traction. Hold onto a railing or

firmly grip the arm of a friend.

- **Outsmart the cold**—Pay attention to your surroundings. Most falls occur out of carelessness. Do not go sledding at night when potential hazards can be hidden.

- **Salt those sidewalks**—Many people slip and fall on outdoor steps and walkways. Make sure your neighborhood streets are frequently plowed and salted to prevent other accidents.

- **Fun in the snow**—When engaging in sporting activities, use protective equipment and make certain your skis, skates, shoes and other gear fit you correctly. Helmets are a must for skiing, sledding and snowboarding. If you will be competing, make sure you condition in the off-season. If you're trying a new sport for the first time, get proper instruction from an expert.

The North American Spine Society (NASS) president Joel Press, MD, says, "Just because it's winter does not mean you have to stay inside all day in order to avoid the elements and the risk of falling or slipping. It's a great season to be active and enjoy the outdoors. Just make sure you dress appropriately, warm up your muscles and follow these helpful tips to prevent potential hazards to keep your spine safe and sound."

NASS is the nation's leading nonprofit, multidisciplinary medical society dedicated to advancing spine care. Individuals interested in locating a spine care professional or improving their spine health can access helpful information at [www.spine.org](http://www.spine.org) or by calling (877) SPINE DR.