

Heart Health

Cold Weather And Cardiovascular Disease

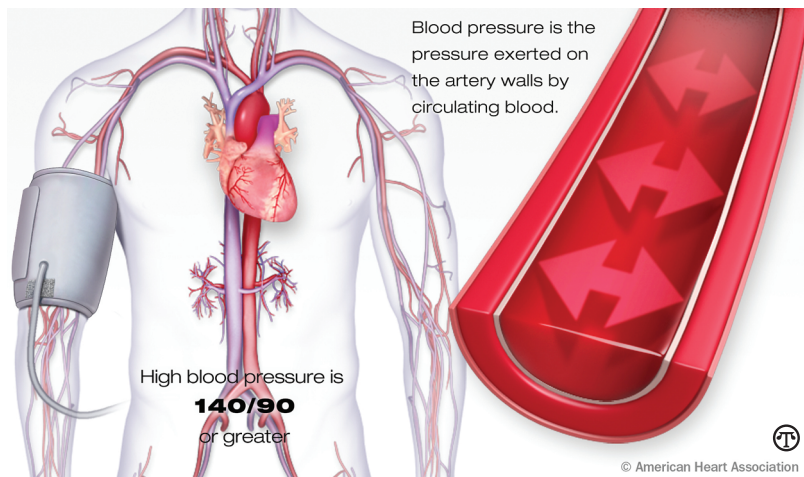


Photo courtesy of the AHA's Watch, Learn and Live library: www.heart.org/watchlearnlive.

(NAPSA)—The cooler temperatures of winter can present health challenges for those with heart disease—and those who love them. To help, the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association offer some tips.

- People who are outdoors in cold weather should avoid sudden exertion, such as lifting a heavy shovelful of snow. Even walking through heavy, wet snow or snowdrifts can strain a person's heart.

Many people aren't conditioned to the physical stress of outdoor activities and don't know the dangers of being outdoors in cold weather. Winter sports enthusiasts who don't take certain precautions can suffer accidental hypothermia.

Hypothermia means the body temperature has fallen below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. It occurs when your body can't produce enough energy to keep the internal body temperature warm enough. It can kill you. Heart failure causes most deaths in hypothermia. Symptoms include lack of coordination, mental confusion, slowed reactions, shivering and sleepiness.

Here are some additional tips:

- To keep warm, wear layers of clothing. This traps air between layers, forming a protective insulation. Also, wear a hat or head scarf. Heat can be lost through your head. And ears are especially prone to frostbite. Keep your hands and feet warm, too, as they tend to lose heat rapidly.

- Don't drink alcoholic beverages before going outdoors or when outside.

- Flu and pneumonia pose greater dangers for people who have heart failure, or any heart condition, than for healthy people.

Ask a health care professional about getting a yearly influenza vaccine and a one-time pneumococcal vaccine (to guard against the most common form of bacterial pneumonia). Both vaccines are generally safe and seldom cause any severe reactions.

- As much as possible, avoid anyone who has a cold or the flu.

- Stay out of crowds during the height of flu season—usually October through March.

- Be sure to wash your hands thoroughly and frequently, especially after using the bathroom and before eating. Keep your hands away from your face and insist that all caregivers wash their hands thoroughly before approaching you.

- Always read the labels on all over-the-counter (OTC) medications, especially if you have blood pressure of 120/80 mm Hg or higher. Look for warnings to those with high blood pressure and to those who take blood pressure medications. Consult your doctor before taking any over-the-counter medications or supplements.

- Be aware that the use of decongestants may raise blood pressure or interfere with the effectiveness of some prescribed blood pressure medications.

- Check the sodium content of any OTCs. Some are high in sodium, which can raise blood pressure. People with high blood pressure should have under 1,500 mg of sodium a day from all sources.

Learn more online at www.heart.org/coldweather and www.heart.org/hbp. Merck Consumer Care, maker of Coricidin® HBP, is a sponsor of the American Heart Association's High Blood Pressure website.