

Wellness Articles

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WINTER WALKING TIPS

With the beauty and fun of winter comes the potential for hazardous conditions, particularly when walking outdoors. Slippery sidewalks and icy pathways can pose a significant risk for falls and injuries. Often, thin layers of ice are difficult to see when melting snow freezes overnight. No matter how well the snow is removed from parking lots or sidewalks, there will still be slippery places.

Tripping and falling can cause damage such as bruises and sprains, or even more serious injuries such as broken bones or concussions. So, it is important to keep in mind winter walking safety tips during the colder months.

How can I avoid slipping and falling on snow or ice?

- *Proper Footwear* – What you wear on your feet can help lower your risk of falling. Boots or shoes that fit well and have a good grip are the best choice. Special items like shoe grips or ice cleats can give you extra traction when you're walking on snowy or icy surfaces. You can buy these items from places like department or sporting goods stores. Always take off these grips or cleats when walking inside because they can make you slip on indoor flooring.
- *Be careful when walking!* – Find a path around snow or ice when you can. Learn how to [Walk Like a Penguin](#). Walk slowly, take small steps, and point your toes out slightly to be more stable on icy paths. Keep your head up and don't lean forward. Keep your hands out of your pockets to help keep your balance. If you use a cane, you can buy an ice pick for the cane.
- *Plan ahead* – Make sure you have enough time to get where you're going. Rushing or not paying attention to your steps can often lead to falls or the potential to slip on icy surfaces. Assume that all wet, dark areas on the pavement may be slippery or icy. If you can, walk around them.
- *Walk on cleared walkways* – Choose well-maintained routes with minimal ice and snow accumulation whenever possible. Sidewalks that are regularly cleared of snow and ice are safer for walking. Avoid shortcuts that haven't been cleared.

- *Check the weather!* – Download a local weather app on your phone (such as Government of Canada Weather Alerts) so you know what the weather is like before you go outside. Sudden changes in the temperature can cause ice to melt and freeze, making the ground more unpredictable.
- *Pay attention* – Stay vigilant and be aware of your surroundings, especially when walking in unfamiliar or potentially hazardous areas. Watch for patches of ice, snow-covered obstacles, and uneven surfaces. Don't text or talk on your phone and walk at the same time, as this can divert your attention from potential dangers.
- *Use handrails on stairs and ramps* – If you're walking on a slope where there are no handrails, be extra careful. Consider using walking aids such as trekking poles or an ice grip attachment for your cane to provide additional stability. These aids can enhance your balance and help prevent falls, especially on icy or uneven terrain.
- *Spread sand or grit on your steps and walkways* – You could also try carrying a small container of sand or grit to sprinkle on icy or sloped surfaces that you can't walk around.
- *Travel light* – Try not to carry heavy things that can make you lose your balance, or large things that could block your view. If possible, use a backpack to keep your hands free.

Taking a walk is a great way to enjoy the beauty of the season and it is one of the best ways to keep fit. But just one bad fall can have long-term consequences which is why it is important to be prepared, plan ahead, and Walk Like a Penguin!