



Take Care in the COLD

Cold Weather Danger is MORE than Ice and Frostbite!!!

Lowering the thermostat to save on heating bills can have devastating effects on older persons. A drop of only a few degrees can result in the condition known as hypothermia. When body temperature drops below 96 degrees for a prolonged period, the results of hypothermia can be fatal.

Older people who suffer from arthritis, Alzheimer's or other dementia, thyroid problems, stroke, Parkinson's and people who take medications like tranquilizers, sleeping pills or antidepressants have a higher risk for hypothermia.

People over the age of 60 should keep their thermostat at 68 to 70 in living or sleeping areas. Remember that the thermostat temperature does not always show the accurate temperature of the room. If the thermostat or room temperature is lower, dress warmly or use an electric blanket.

To prevent hypothermia, the National Institute on Aging recommends:

- Ask your doctor if the prescription drugs or other over-the-counter drugs you take can affect body temperature regulation.
- Dress warmly in layers of clothing even when indoors. Wear warm clothing to bed and use blankets.
- Ask friends or neighbors to look in once or twice a day if you live alone. Register with Interfaith's Older Adult Programs at (414) 291-7500 for their Telephone Reassurance program and Neighborhood Outreach.
- Use alcohol moderately, if at all. Avoid alcohol altogether near bedtime.
- Consume hot foods and liquids to raise your body temperature and keep warm.

To determine if an older person is suffering from hypothermia, watch for the "*UMBLES*" – stumbles, mumbles, fumbles, and grumbles, which show changes in motor coordination and levels of consciousness. Specific symptoms include:

- Confusion or sleepiness
- Slowed, slurred speech, or shallow breathing
- Weak pulse: low blood pressure
- A change in behavior during cold weather or a change in the way a person looks.
- Chilly rooms or other signs that the person has been in a cold place.
- Excess shivering or no shivering in a cold room: stiffness in the arms or legs. Poor control over body movements or slow reactions.

One sure way to detect hypothermia is by taking a person's temperature. A temperature below 96°F will not register on many oral thermometers. If the temperature reading is at or below 96°F, call 911 immediately. If emergency help is not available right away, move the hypothermic person to a warmer location, and wrap him or her in a warm blanket to stop further heat loss. You can also use your own body heat to keep the person warm but be gentle and do not rub the skin roughly to get circulation going.

Check if you are eligible for Energy Assistance to help with heating bills. For information on home energy assistance for low income elders in Milwaukee contact:

- By Phone: 414-270-4-MKE (414-270-4653)
- Online: Schedule an appointment at www.ca-apps.org/MilwaukeeHeat/

Use Space Heaters Safely to Kill the Chill Not Yourself!

Heating equipment is the leading cause of home fires during the months of December, January and February. Two of every five home heating fires in the U.S. and four of every five related deaths, were attributed to space heating equipment.

All types of common space heating equipment are involved in home fires: portable electric, portable kerosene, wood stoves, fireplaces with inserts and room gas heaters.

Safety Tips from the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA):

- Space heaters need space. Portable space heaters need a three-foot clearance from anything that can burn and should always be turned off when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- When buying a new unit, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing lab. Be sure that a qualified technician installs the unit or checks that the unit has been installed properly.
- Wood and coal stoves, fireplaces, chimneys, chimney connectors, and all other solid fueled heating equipment need to be inspected annually by a professional and cleaned as often as the inspections indicate.
- Use a sturdy fireplace screen to keep sparks from flying into the room
- Portable kerosene heaters must be fueled only in a well-ventilated area, free of flame and other heat sources, and only when the device has cooled completely. Use only the type of kerosene specified by the manufacturer for that device, and never use gasoline instead of kerosene. Also, be sure that portable kerosene heaters are legal for home use in your state.
- When turning a heating device on or off, be careful to follow the manufacturer's instructions. When buying heaters, look for devices with automatic shutoff features.
- Be sure any gas-fueled heating device is installed with proper attention to ventilation, and never put unvented gas space heaters in bedrooms or bathrooms. Also, LP (liquefied Petroleum) gas heaters with self-contained fuel supplies are prohibited for home use by NFPA codes.

Always be sure to check the heater over before using it for the first time and every first use of the season. Be sure the unit and the heating elements are free of dust and dirt before starting. Be sure that all the heating elements, coils and chords, plugs and other connections are free from damage and that they are not brittle or cracked from age. Do not overload plugs or extension cords when using the heater.

Did you know that if you qualified for Energy assistance you are also given access to the Weatherization Program referral?

Weatherization agencies can assess your home for work that easily reduce your energy use, and might even save you money. The goal of the weatherization program is to save energy by targeting households with an excessive energy burden and that are made up of elderly, handicapped and/or children under 6 years of age.

Weatherization services are provided by:

- La Casa de Esperanza, Inc.
- Partners for Community Development, Inc.
- Social Development Commission

Winter Care for Seniors

Winter is an especially important time to keep an eye on seniors to make sure they are living as safely as possible. In Addition to cold weather, ice and snow, the winter season can bring health problems and injury to senior citizens. That's why it's important for people to check in with their older adult family members, friends and neighbors. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Falls are a concern for seniors. Putting road salt, cat litter or sand on sidewalks, steps and driveways will make these areas as slip-free as possible. Seniors should also wear boots with non-skid soles to make a fall less likely to occur. Older adults, especially those with heart disease or high blood pressure should leave snow shoveling to others.
- Cold temperatures make senior citizens susceptible to hypothermia, a dangerous drop in body temperature. Older adults tend to produce less body heat than younger people and it's hard for them to tell when the temperature is too low. Learn the warning signs of this weather related illness and how to prevent it.
- Keep indoor temperatures no lower than 55 degrees. If going outdoors is necessary, dress in layers to stay warm. Wearing two or three thin layers of loose-fitting clothing is warmer than a single layer of thick clothing.

It's a good idea to check on elderly loved ones regularly or, if you live out of town, make arrangements for neighbors to check in and provide their number to call in an emergency. If you are unfamiliar with the neighborhood, try contacting Interfaith Older Adult Programs at (414)-291-7500 and find out about their Neighborhood Outreach program, Telephone Reassurance program or the Good Neighbor Project. All these services can help an elder who may be isolated during an emergency. With your help, older adults can enjoy the winter months safely.

If you should like more information about helping older adults in your community stay safe during emergency situations, contact the Aging Resource Center of Milwaukee County's Call Center at 289-6874. The Call Center is open from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.



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414-289-6874 / TRS: 7-1-1 / Toll Free: 1-866-229-9695