



# Risktopics

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## Tips for wintertime walking to avoid slips and falls

It's that time of year when slips and falls can occur. The following information provides sound advice on being aware of your surroundings during the winter months and ways to prevent slips and falls. Walking to and from parking lots during the winter requires special attention. We often forget how dangerous slipping and falling can be. The National Safety Council estimates occupational falls cause 1,500 deaths and 300,000 injuries per year.

### How to prevent slips and falls

Wear the proper footwear. Choose a good pair of winter boots. For warmth and stability, look for features such as well insulated and waterproof, thick, non-slip tread sole, wide, low heels and light in weight.

- Bend your knees and take small steps to keep your center of balance under you.
- Walk slowly and never run on icy ground.
- Keep both hands free for balance, rather than in your pockets.
- Use handrails from start to finish.
- Avoid carrying loads on stairways or carry loads you can see over.
- Keep your eyes on where you are going.
- Test potentially slick areas by tapping your foot on them.
- Step, don't jump from vehicles and equipment.
- When getting out of your car, swing both legs around and position yourself with both legs squarely in front of you and feet properly positioned on the ground (avoiding ice if possible) and support your arms by holding onto the vehicle and then stand up.
- Keep walkways clear of debris, water, ice and slippery materials.

### Safe winter walking

No matter how well snow and ice are removed from streets and sidewalks, employees will encounter slippery surfaces when walking outdoors in the winter. It is important to be continually aware of the dangers and to walk safely on ice and slippery surfaces.

- Plan ahead. Give yourself sufficient time and plan your route.

- Wear shoes or boots that provide traction on snow and ice, such as rubber and neoprene composite. Avoid plastic and leather soles.
- Use special care when entering and exiting vehicles. Use the vehicle for support.
- Walk on designated walkways as much as possible. Taking shortcuts over snow piles and areas where snow and ice removal is not feasible can be hazardous. Look ahead when you walk. A sidewalk completely covered with ice may require travel along its grassy edge for traction.

When given no choice but to walk on ice, consider the following:

- Take short steps or shuffle for stability.
- Bend slightly, walk flat-footed with your center of gravity directly over your feet. Be prepared to fall.
- If you fall, fall with sequential contacts at your thigh, hip and shoulder to avoid using your arms to protect against breakage.
- Bend your back and head forward so you won't slam your head on the pavement as your feet shoot out from under you.
- Ice grippers on footwear can help you walk on hard-packed snow and ice. But be careful! Grippers become dangerously slippery and must be removed before walking on smooth surfaces such as stone, tile and ceramic. Before buying the grippers, be sure you are able to attach and remove them from your boots. This is best done sitting down.

Finally, when entering buildings, remove snow and water from footwear to prevent creating wet, slippery conditions indoors.

A few simple precautions can reduce your chances of being injured from a slip or fall.

- Use floor mats to remove moisture from the soles of your shoes upon entering a building.
- Don't allow rain that has collected on your umbrella to be deposited on indoor walking surfaces.
- Avoid inclines and slippery walking surfaces if possible.
- Be aware of your footing and any potential slip, trip or fall hazard that may be present.
- Select appropriate footwear. Remember no shoe sole material is perfect under all conditions. Shoe soles made of plastic or leather and high-heeled shoes are less than ideal, especially during wet weather.
- Report slip, trip and fall hazards.
- Use a handrail where available.

### How do I walk safely on snow or ice?

- Walking on snow or ice is especially treacherous, and wearing proper footwear is essential. Well-insulated boots with good rubber treads is a must for walking during or after a winter storm. Keeping a pair of rubber overshoes with good treads to fit over your street shoes is a good idea during the winter months.
- When walking on an icy or snow-covered walkway, take short steps and walk at a slower pace so you can react quickly to a change in traction.
- If you must walk in the street, walk against the traffic and as close to the curb as you can.
- Be on the lookout for vehicles that may have lost traction and are slipping toward you. Be aware that approaching vehicles may not be able to stop at crosswalks or traffic signals.
- At night, wear bright clothing or reflective gear, as dark clothing will make it difficult for motorists to see you.
- During the day, wear sunglasses to help you see better and avoid hazards.

When these helpful hints don't work, and you know you are going to slip, try to reduce your potential injury when falling by:

- Rolling with the fall. Relax as much as possible when you begin to fall.
- Tossing the load you are carrying. Protect yourself instead of the objects being carried.

## References

Canada Safety Council:

<http://www.safety-council.org/info/seniors/winter.html>

OSHA:

<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/emergencypreparedness/guides/winterstorms.html>

Wayne State University:

<http://www.oehs.wayne.edu/winterslip.htm>

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