

Fashion isn't cool when cold can freeze fingers, nose, ears, burn expert says

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With arctic blasts moving in, time to closet trendy clothes and cover up to avoid frostbite. Drawstring casual pants, shorts, baseball caps and flip flops, even with socks, are obvious "no-no's." But what about other usual gear?

The popular half-gloves that leave fingers uncovered for texting may be good for communicating electronically, but they may also lead to permanent loss of fingers caused by exposure to the cold.

"Fingers are one of the first [body parts](#) to feel the effects of the cold and damp, and along with toes, ears and the nose, are frequently subjected to [frostbite](#) and even amputation," said Arthur Sanford, MD, division of trauma, surgical critical care and burns, Loyola University Health System. "Better to fat-finger a text due to winter gloves than to lose a finger due to the cold."

Frostbite is most likely to happen in body parts farthest from the heart and those with large exposed areas. "Blood vessels start to constrict at or below 90 degrees Fahrenheit to preserve body temperature," Sanford said. "The lack of blood in these areas of the body can lead to freezing and the death of skin tissue."

Sanford said he treats frostbite in people of all ages. "The young man who insists on wearing tennis shoes that get soggy and freeze. The teenaged girl with cotton leggings. The younger person who goes on a drinking bender and walks home in the snow and damp is also a familiar

sight at Loyola trauma," he said. "The senior citizen who goes out in the snow to get her mail, falls, breaks a hip and lies in the cold and wet until being discovered is a typical victim of frostbite and what most people imagine."

Here are winter wellness tips from Dr. Sanford and Loyola:

- Dress in layers. "If a sweater, pair of socks or other article of clothing gets wet, you can quickly remove it and still be protected from the cold and wet," he said.
- Wear a hat, gloves or mittens and proper footwear, including socks and boots. "Texting gloves may look cool and be handy for communicating or may show off your polished nails, but it is better to wear full gloves or mittens and save your fingers," Sanford said. "And cover your ears and the top of your head with a snug hat."
- Stay dry. "Wet socks are especially dangerous and can lead to a condition called trench foot, which results in [poor blood circulation](#), tissue decay, infections and even amputation," he said.
- When suffering from prolonged exposure to cold, use room temperature or slightly warm water to gently revitalize the body. "Do not use hot water, do not rub with handfuls of snow and do not vigorously massage the frozen area," Sanford warned. Overstimulation can actually worsen the situation.
- If the affected area becomes numb, turns red or blue, swells or feels hot, go to the Emergency Department. "An emergency physician will assess the tissue and take the proper steps to save the body part," Sanford said.
- The historically cold and snowy winter in 2014 saw an increase in frostbite cases at Loyola. " 'Frostbite in January, operate in July,' is a common mantra here at Loyola," Sanford said. "Bundling up for winter may take you out of media circulation temporarily or

flatten your hair, but better that than to permanently lose the ability to text or the tips of your ears due to frostbite."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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