

Slip sliding away: Shield yourself from winter injury

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A white winter landscape might look magical, but the cold and snow and ice can make even the simplest of tasks potentially dangerous.

"It's slip and fall season," said Dr. Letitia Bradford, an [orthopedic surgeon](#) who practices in rural communities in New Mexico and California. "We see a lot of ankle and [wrist fractures](#) during this time as people are slipping on water when it's raining and ice spots or snow in colder areas."

Orthopedic surgeons with the American College of Surgeons (ACS) have some important tips for getting through the winter safe and injury-free:

Slow down

People who are cautious and mindful of conditions around them are less likely to slip and fall, Bradford said.

"The thing that I tell people the most is to really take their time when doing something. Most of the time, injuries like slips and falls happen when you're in a hurry," Bradford said.

People should move slowly and deliberately and keep an eye out for hazards like puddles, black ice and snow-hidden curbs when walking about, especially when carrying things like grocery bags that obstruct your view of the ground.

"You can't always watch out for ice spots because they do sneak up on you sometimes, but try to be wary of them when walking," Bradford said. "Taking your time really is the key to a lot of injury prevention."

Pick the right footwear

Shoes or boots with proper grip and good traction are essential for winter walking, even when completing short tasks outside.

People who must go out in treacherous conditions might consider adding traction devices like ice cleats or ice grips to their footwear, Bradford said.

"And if you are older and need to use a cane or walker, I cannot stress to you enough the importance of using that cane or walker in these times because it gives you an extra point of fixation and support on the ground," Bradford said.

Keep your core strong

Winter often demands people use muscles that are otherwise neglected, whether they are shoveling snow, pushing a stuck car or clearing tree limbs broken by ice or snow.

"A lot of people can aggravate their backs and muscles from overusing muscles that they don't normally use," Dr. Todd Albert, surgeon-in-chief emeritus at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City, said in an ACS news release. "We see strain injuries from that kind of overuse."

To ward these injuries off, consider exercising the core year-round by engaging in a mix of aerobics and strength training classes at least three times a week.

A strong core trained by yoga or Pilates in particular can act as a brace to protect against serious injury.

"I think doing all of those things together will both increase your bone density and balance to protect against injuries that occur more often in the winter," Albert said.

Know your limits

Many folks take pride in their prowess at [winter sports](#) like skiing or snowboarding, but these high-impact activities can be dangerous if a person overestimates their skills.

Albert has become a "ballroom skier" these days, trading in black diamond runs for less risky ski trails.

"If you're a skier and you're 40 years old, don't think you can ski like you did when you were 20 years old," Albert said.

This extends to chores around the home as well—even taking out the trash can lead to an injury if a person falls.

"Any kind of rotational injury can cause skeletal injuries," said Dr. Brad Yoo, an associate professor of orthopedics and rehabilitation at Yale School of Medicine. "There are a myriad of injuries that can occur due to slips and falls, so try to be very cognizant and conscious of what kind of surface and terrain you're on."

Yoo also urges people to reach out to their doctor promptly if they can't tell how badly they've been injured in a fall, particularly if over-the-counter pain relievers aren't easing the swelling and pain.

"If the suspicion is there, you should seek care. You don't want to delay your care for four or five days thinking it's nothing," Yoo said.

"Orthopaedic injuries are easier to manage if the problem is dealt with urgently."

Watch out for your neighbors

Small acts of kindness can make a big impact on those around you, especially if extended snowstorms lead to heavy loads of snow compacting and turning into ice.

"If there are people near you who can't get out of their house because they're older or have other issues, be a good neighbor and clear their snow if you can," said Dr. Bryant Oliphant, an orthopaedic surgeon at Detroit Receiving Hospital.

"People aren't necessarily aware of ice or other slick spots when they're going for a walk, so if you're aware and can maintain your sidewalks and roads, I think that goes a long way to helping other people out," Oliphant added.

Seniors in particular could use the help to avoid a "game-changing" injury, Oliphant said.

"You're doing fine, and all of a sudden, you break your hip, wrist or ankle," Oliphant said. "That can ruin your winter and change things, especially if you're elderly. It can be very hard to recover from these types of injuries."

More information: Ohio State University has more about [winter safety](#).

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