

Don't become a blizzard casualty

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Doctor shares tips for staying warm, avoiding falls.

(HealthDay)—The blizzard conditions and frigid cold blanketing the U.S. Northeast pose numerous health threats, a doctor warns.

If you must be outdoors, staying warm is critical, said Dr. Robert Glatter, an emergency physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

"In the [cold weather](#), it's important to keep your head, face and nose covered, but most importantly dress in layers to prevent [heat loss](#)," Glatter said.

He recommends wearing sturdy insulated boots with thick wool socks while shoveling snow. Also, pay special attention to the head and scalp, as well as the nose, neck and ears, "which are often exposed to the cold air, and thus at risk for heat loss in cold temperatures," Glatter said in a hospital news release.

Shoveling in cold weather can greatly boost your risk of heart attack, especially if you have [chronic health problems](#) such as high [blood pressure](#) or diabetes, or a history of heart disease and stroke, Glatter warned.

"It's quite important to take frequent breaks while shoveling, but also to keep yourself well hydrated both before and after shoveling. If you develop chest pain, difficulty breathing, dizziness, arm or

back pain while shoveling, stop and call 911," he said.

Glatter said he also recommends using a smaller snow shovel or consider using a snow blower if you have to remove snow. Lifting [heavy snow](#) can "potentially raise your blood pressure sharply as you lift," he said.

"It's safer to lift smaller amounts more frequently—or if you can't lift it, just push the snow," he added.

Shoveling also carries a risk of back injuries, so be sure to lift the shovel with your legs, he advised.

"Falls and slips when walking outdoors may also account for back pain that develops as well. People should wear sturdy, insulated boots and walk slowly, looking carefully at both feet and the pavement in front of them to avoid any potential patches of ice mixed in with the snow," Glatter said.

His other cold-weather advice?

Don't drink caffeine or alcohol immediately before or after shoveling, because they can cause dehydration. But drink plenty of water before and after shoveling.

Hypothermia, another threat, occurs when your body loses heat faster than you can produce it. This can happen within 15 to 20 minutes if you're outside in below-freezing temperatures without proper clothing, Glatter said. Symptoms include dizziness, confusion and shivering. Hypothermia can lead to heart failure or death, especially in people with [heart disease](#), diabetes and [high blood pressure](#).

If you suspect that someone has hypothermia, call 911, get the person inside and replace cold, wet clothing with warm blankets, Glatter said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers more [winter health and safety tips](#).

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