



**MICHIGAN STATE
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Extension

Senior Health Line

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Cold Weather Problems



Winter can wreak havoc on our bodies in many different ways; from injuring our backs

while shoveling snow to slipping on ice and breaking bones to being outside for too long and developing frostbite on our fingers and toes.

Moving too much heavy snow can be dangerous. Nationwide, there are thousands of injuries and around one hundred deaths that occur each year as a result of shoveling snow. Especially if you are not physically active, moving hundreds of pounds of snow, even with a snow blower, can put a strain on your heart, your back, and your lungs. Cold weather alone can increase your heart rate and your blood pressure. It can lead to blood clotting and the constriction of arteries which leads to a decrease of blood flowing throughout your body. This is true for everyone, but older adults and those with health issues are at greater risk for health problems associated with moving snow.

The National Safety Council advises the following-

- *Do not shovel snow immediately after eating
- *Do not smoke while shoveling snow
- *Push the snow instead of lifting it

*If you do lift the snow, lift with your legs and not with your back. Also, use a small shovel so you are not lifting too much at one time

*Stop when you get tired or short of breath

*If you have a history of heart disease, check with your doctor before moving attempting to move any snow.

If you are using a snow blower, be sure to keep hands away from moving parts at all time. If the snow blower jams, turn it off before looking for the problem. Always be sure the snow blower is turned off before adding fuel and be careful not to run the snow blower in enclosed areas as carbon monoxide can build up.

Older adults with poor circulation and nerve damage can increase the risk for foot and ankle problems in the winter. If your feet get wet from rain or snow, change out of the wet socks and towel dry your feet as soon as possible. Moisture from the wet socks can cause bacteria to multiply leading to an infection. Wet feet and dry air can also lead to chilblains a condition of dry, cracking and itching feet, so use a moisturizer on your feet daily.

Take care when walking outside during icy weather. Women should avoid high heels and wear sturdy boots with a non-slip bottom. If you do slip and fall seek medical attention if you suspect there may be a broken bone. Until you can get treatment, try the RICE principle of Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation.

Being outside for even short periods of time when the temperature is very low can cause frostbite. Frostbite occurs when tissue freezes and forms ice crystals inside of cells in the body.

Frostbite occurs as blood is moved from the legs and arms to vital organs in the center of the body like the heart, to maintain a higher body temperature. As fingers and toes lose their blood supply, they also lose feeling and color. They may become numb and white or gray in color. As these ice crystals thaw out, more damage may occur. People with neuropathy (nerve damage) or impaired circulation are at a higher risk of developing frostbite as are people on beta blocker medications which reduce the flow of blood to the skin. If someone around you shows any signs of frostbite, get that person medical attention as soon as possible. Until medical attention can be received, move the person inside where it is warm. Remove wet and restrictive clothing. You may soak the affected areas in warm, NOT HOT, water until it feels warm and is no longer numb. Do not use a heating pad, fire, blow dryer or radiator to warm the area. Do not rub the affected areas and do not break blisters that may be on the skin. Cover them loosely with sterile gauze.

The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons recommends the following precautions to reduce the risk of frostbite:

- *Dress in light layers that can keep you warm and dry
- *Be sure your outer layer is water repellent
- *Wear gloves, hats and warm socks
- *Avoid alcohol and cigarettes before going outside in the winter
- *Do not stay outside if you are cold or wet
- *Remove wet clothing as soon as possible after coming indoors
- *Examine your hands and feet for signs of frostbite
- *If you develop numbness, go inside and warm up as soon as possible

For more information on frostbite, you may go to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/staysafe/frostbite.html>.

Unstuff that Stuffiness

Dry air during the winter can lead to a chronic stuffy nose that is just uncomfortable and annoying. Over the counter decongestants may help relieve the symptoms of a stuffy nose. The American Academy of Family Physicians recommends the following:

- *Read and follow package directions
- *Do not take more than the recommended dose
- *Check with your doctor before taking any over the counter medications to be sure it is safe with the other medications you are taking
- *Do not take more than one decongestant at a time
- *Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions or concerns.

No Bake Apple Cinnamon Bites

- 1 cup dates
- ¼ cup shredded apple
- ½ Tablespoon cinnamon
- 1 cup almonds
- ½ cup shredded coconut

Soak the dates in warm water for 10 minutes. Drain. Put dates, apple and cinnamon in a food processor or blender and process until smooth. Add the almonds and pulse 5 to 10 times. Refrigerate for ½ hour. Roll into 16 balls then roll the balls in the coconut. Store in fridge or freezer.

Nutritional Value per ball
Calories 100
Fat 5 grams
Sodium 10 milligrams
Carbohydrate 12 grams
Fiber 2 grams
Protein 2 grams



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