

## Tips for outdoor winter activities

Many of us enjoy being outdoors in winter, but there are some things about physical activity in cold weather that we should be aware of as we get older:

- ☆ Regardless of age, cold weather puts a strain on the heart by narrowing blood vessels. But older people are less able to maintain core body temperature in cold weather compared to younger individuals.
- ☆ As we get older, many of us also take longer to realize that we are getting cold and to take action against cold stress.
- ☆ In addition, some conditions and medications can put older adults at an even greater risk for hypothermia (when body temperature drops below 35° C).<sup>1</sup>

### Should we stop being active outside when it gets cold?

Older Canadians do tend to be less active when the weather gets cold.<sup>2</sup> But it is important to stay physically active all year round. While below freezing temperatures present unique hazards for older adults, here are some **tips for outdoor activity**:

- ☆ Be aware of the outside temperature and wind chill factor. Get outside during the warmest part of the day. Pay attention to extreme cold weather alerts and avoid outdoor exercise during those alerts.
- ☆ Dress in layers so that clothing can be removed or added as needed. For instance, have an inner, middle, and outer layer. Don't wear shoes that are too tight — they can decrease blood flow to your feet.
- ☆ Be aware of the signs of hypothermia and frostbite (feeling cold, shivering, cold hands, face, or feet, skin numbness, pale spots).
- ☆ You still need to stay hydrated. As we get older, we have a lower perception of thirst. That increases the risk for dehydration. So don't wait until you 'feel thirsty'. The sensation

of thirst alone may be a late indicator that you need to drink fluids.

- ☆ If it's a nice sunny winter day, you also still need to think about your eyes. Wear sunglasses.

### Activities to avoid

One activity to avoid, particularly if you have a heart condition, is shovelling snow. Heavy snow along with cold temperatures causes strain on the heart. That increases the risk of a heart attack (particularly in men).<sup>3</sup> Many municipalities offer snow removal programs for seniors. Or, you can look for volunteer organizations in your area.

### Active aging at home

If it is too cold to go out, there are now many good ideas for at-home workouts. Check out our Active Aging at Home page on our website (<https://www.activeagingcanada.ca/>) for inspiration!

### Resources

An older adult's guide to exercising in cold weather <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/when-is-body-temperature-too-low>

Exercising in the Cold: Chilled, not Shaking! <https://www.acsm.org/blog-detail/acsm-certified-blog/2022/01/11/exercising-in-the-cold-chilled-not-shaking>

Extreme Cold. Health Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/your-health/environment/extreme-cold.html>

### References

1. Smolander J. *Effect of cold exposure on older humans*. Int J Sports Med. 2002 Feb;23(2):86-92. 2002.

2. G R Jones , C Brandon , D P Gill . *Physical activity levels of community-dwelling older adults are influenced by winter weather variables*. Arch Gerontol Geriatr. Jul;71:28-33. 2017.

3. Auger N et al. Association between quantity and duration of snowfall and risk of myocardial infarction. CMAJ February 13, 2017.