

Cold Weather Tips for Older Adults

Older adults often make less body heat because of a slower metabolism and less physical activity. When your body gets colder faster than it can make heat, your body temperature falls. When your body gets too cold, it is called hypothermia. Hypothermia can make a person sleepy, confused, and clumsy. Because it happens gradually and affects thinking, a person may not realize they need help. That makes it especially dangerous.

People 65 years of age and older should check the temperature in the home often during severely cold weather. If the home temperature cannot stay warm, if possible, make arrangements to stay someplace warm. If that is not possible, use blankets and sleeping bags for warmth, drink warm beverages and avoid alcohol, wear a hat and scarf and extra clothes.

If you are 65 or older, have someone check on you regularly, especially during cold weather. Others should check on elderly friends and neighbors frequently to make sure that their homes are adequately heated and that they are safe.

The Best Clothing for Cold Weather

Adults should wear:

- Several layers of loose-fitting clothing
- Sleeves that are snug at the wrist
- A hat and scarf or knit face mask to cover face and mouth
- Mittens (they are warmer than gloves)
- Water-resistant coat and shoes, especially if wet or windy outside

Be sure outer layer of clothing is tightly woven, and if possible, wind resistant to reduce body-heat loss caused by wind. Wool, silk, or polypropylene inner layers of clothes hold more body heat than cotton.

Stay dry—wet clothing chills the body quickly. Extra sweat increases heat loss so remove extra layers of clothing when you feel too warm. Do not ignore shivering. It is an important sign the body is losing heat.

Eating and Drinking During Really Cold Weather

Eating well-balanced meals will help you stay warmer. Do not drink alcoholic beverages—they cause your body to lose heat more rapidly. Instead, drink warm beverages such as hot chocolate to help maintain your body temperature. If you have any dietary restrictions, ask your doctor.

Heating your Home Safely

If you plan to use a wood stove, fireplace, or space heater, be extremely careful and follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Remember these safety tips:

- Store a multipurpose, dry chemical fire extinguisher near the area to be heated.
- Do not burn paper in a fireplace.
- Make sure you have enough ventilation. Open an interior door or slightly open a window if you must use a kerosene heater.
- Only use the type of fuel your heater is designed to use—no substitutes.
- If your heater has a damaged electrical cord or produces sparks, do not use it.
- Use fireplaces, wood stoves, and other combustion heaters only if they are properly vented to the outside and do not leak fumes or gas into the indoor air space. Make sure chimneys and flues are cleaned periodically.
- Do not place a space heater near things that may catch on fire, like drapes, furniture or bedding.
- Never use a gas range or oven to heat a home.
- Learn more about wood smoke and the dangers of carbon monoxide: www.epa.gov/burnwise/wood-smoke-and-your-health

