

# The Great Outdoors

## Cold Weather Edition



Information for you and people you support with disabilities



Outdoor activities are an important part of life. Here are some things to consider to make the great outdoors more enjoyable for all during the cooler months.

### Sun Protection and Windburn

Even when the weather is on the cooler side, the sun's rays can still cause a sunburn. If you are at higher elevations, exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation is increased. Fresh white snow can also increase exposure to UV radiation by reflecting it and can even double it.

Windburn can also occur after exposure to cold, dry air. The symptoms are similar to a sunburn, and often, the two conditions are seen together. Windburn can be worse in people with skin conditions, such as eczema and rosacea.

*Consider these precautions:*

### Sunscreen and moisturizers

- Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher
- Apply liberally to all sun-exposed areas, including hands, ears, nose, face, neck, arms, legs, and feet. If hair is thin or absent, include the scalp as well
- Reapply sunscreen at least every 2 hours
- Applying skin moisturizers can help reduce windburn and soothe its symptoms
- Use lip balm with an SPF of 30 or higher to protect from sun and windburn

## Clothing and accessories

- Utilize clothing that has an SPF rating when available
- Wear a wide-brimmed, lined hat or any hat that retains body heat and gloves
- Cover face with a scarf or similar item
- Sunglasses should have a UV400 rating of 100% to protect the eyes from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays. Dark glasses alone are not sufficient
- Umbrellas can help provide shade, but they don't protect against UV rays that reflect off of snow or ice
- Wear shoes with sturdy, non-slip soles to prevent falls on ice or snow
- Change clothing, gloves, and socks as soon as possible if they become wet

## Medications\* that can increase light sensitivity of the skin and/or eyes include certain:

- Antibiotics like tetracycline and ciprofloxacin
- Antidepressants like doxepin (Sinequan) or St. John's wort
- Antifungals like Tinactin or griseofulvin
- Antihistamines like diphenhydramine (Benadryl) or loratadine (Claritin)
- Blood pressure medications like atenolol (Tenormin) or metoprolol (Lopressor)
- Cholesterol medications like atorvastatin (Lipitor) or simvastatin (Zocor)
- Diuretics (fluid/water pills) like hydrochlorothiazide (Microzide) or furosemide (Lasix)
- Diabetes medications like metformin (Glucophage) or exenatide (Byetta)
- Antipsychotic drugs like risperidone (Risperdal) or quetiapine (Seroquel)
- Anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil)
- Antiseizure medications like phenytoin (Dilantin) or carbamazepine (Tegretol)
- Heart medications like digoxin (Lanoxin) or captopril (Capoten)
- Antiarrhythmics like sotalol (Betapace) or amiodarone (Cordarone)
- Medications to treat stomach ulcers like omeprazole (Prilosec) or famotidine (Pepcid)

## Hydration

Fluid loss and dehydration can still occur in cool weather, especially when participating in physical activities. Maintaining proper body fluid levels is important. Remember that lack of hydration can increase constipation, as well.

Here are some tips:

- Encourage fluid consumption regularly
- Warm liquids like hot cocoa or caffeine-free tea can assist in maintaining hydration and provide warmth in cooler weather
- Avoid alcohol. It dilates blood vessels, causing the body to lose heat and move heat from vital organs to the skin
- Eat fruits and vegetables with lots of juice like watermelon, peaches, plums, salad greens, radishes, cauliflower, and others
- Limit sugary or caffeinated beverages
- Consider encouraging extra fluid intake before going outside or participating in physical activities

**Signs of dehydration include:**

- Skin dryness and tenting (not quickly returning to shape when gently pinched upward)
- Sunken eyes
- No tears
- Darker colored urine
- Decreased urine output
- Change in level of consciousness

**Medications\* that can increase the risk of dehydration include:**

- Diuretics (fluid/water pills) like chlorothiazide (Diuril) or hydrochlorothiazide (Hydrodiuril)

**Hypothermia**

Hypothermia is a medical emergency. It occurs when your body loses too much heat. When your body temperature drops, your body systems do not work as usual, and severe hypothermia can lead to death. Here are signs of hypothermia:

- Shivering
- Slurred speech
- Slow, shallow breathing
- Weak pulse
- Change in level of consciousness
- Acting clumsy, loss of coordination
- Confusion

**Conditions that place a person at greater risk include:**

- Exhaustion
- Very young or very old age
- People who cannot express early signs of health conditions
- Alcohol use
- Certain medical conditions like hypothyroidism
- Certain medications like antidepressants, antipsychotics, sedatives, and narcotics

**Prevention tips:**

- Dress in warm clothing in multiple, loose layers
- Stay dry and replace wet clothing with dry items
- Avoid activities where you may sweat a lot
- Wear hats and gloves
- Be aware of early warning signs, like shivering, and provide warmth as soon as possible

### **Hypothermia first aid:**

- Handle the person gently
- Move to a warmer environment
- Remove any wet clothing
- Add extra layers like blankets. If possible, warm extra layers in the clothes dryer first
- Provide warm beverages as long as the person is able to drink safely
- Do not apply direct heat like a heating pad or heat lamp to the person
- Do not rub skin to warm
- Seek medical attention

### **Frostbite and Frostnip**

Frostbite is an injury caused by freezing of the skin and underlying tissues. It can occur on exposed skin or skin that is covered. Frostnip is a milder form of cold injury that does not cause permanent damage. Frostbite and frostnip occur most commonly on fingers, toes, ears, cheeks, the nose, and the chin.

### **Signs of frostbite:**

- Cold feeling to skin
- Prickly, "pins and needles" feeling
- Numbness
- Redness or whitish, bluish, or grayish skin color
- Waxy or hard appearance of skin
- Blistering of skin, mainly seen after rewarming

### **Conditions that place a person at greater risk include:**

- Medical conditions that impair the ability to communicate, feel, or respond to coldness, including diabetes, dehydration, Raynaud's syndrome, poor circulation, and cognitive impairments
- Other medical conditions, including hypothyroidism, diabetes, dementia, Parkinson's disease, or arthritis, as they may make it difficult for them to dress properly or get out of the cold. Those with memory loss may not recognize the need for appropriate clothing or the need to get out of the cold
- Alcohol or drug use
- Smoking
- Previous frostbite injury
- Very young or very old age
- Wet clothing
- Taking certain medications like alcohol-based medications or cold medicine. They may affect body temperature regulation

## Prevention:

- Limit time in cold, wet, or windy weather
- Dress in several layers and cover hands, feet, ears, and face
- Use a hat that covers the ears
- Wear mittens instead of gloves, as they provide better protection
- Wear sock liners
- Use insulated boots
- Watch for early warning signs and seek relief and medical attention immediately
- Remove and replace any wet clothing items

## Frostbite and frostnip first aid:

- Reduce any further cold exposure
- Remove wet or restrictive clothing and replace with dry clothing
- Wrap the person in blankets to warm their entire body
- Do not rub the affected area
- Do not use direct heat, such as a heating pad or heat lamp
- Take pressure off the affected area, including limiting walking if the feet are involved
- Do not allow smoking because nicotine further constricts blood vessels
- Do not break the blisters
- Monitor for seizures, especially if the person is rapidly rewarmed
- Seek medical attention

## Safety

### Consider these precautions:

- Uneven ground increases the risk of tripping and falling
- Wear proper footwear for the activity
- Icy and snowy areas are slippery
- Blisters can occur from shoes or ill-fitting clothing. Ensure correct fit and monitor for their appearance
- Though the risk is usually lower in the colder months, be aware of hazardous wildlife
- Have EpiPens available whenever someone is known to have severe allergic reactions.
- Always have two pens in case you need to repeat a dose before emergency help arrives
- Review medications with a pharmacist regarding their effects on light sensitivity and body temperature regulation
- Have a cell phone available and remain in areas of good signal unless other arrangements have been made for emergencies
- Have extra clothing available in case additional layers are needed or to replace wet items
- Have warm or mylar (silver, heat-reflective) blankets available

***Experiencing the great outdoors is an essential part of life. With proper precautions, preparation, and safety awareness, the risks of outdoor activities can be minimized so enjoyment can be had by all!***

\*The lists of medications included here are not all-inclusive. Check with a pharmacist or nurse, as well as drug information fact sheets for each medication, for any sensitivities or warnings.