

WARNING:

Unless it's in your drink, ice is NOT nice.

WAYS TO HELP SENIORS HAVE A SAFE AND HAPPY WINTER!

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AT the age of 88, my grandmother, Beulah, prided herself on two things: bidding a slam in bridge and making it. And being the one among her group of octogenarian friends who had maintained the best health.

She ate well. She drove at a snail's pace. And she always watched her step – until one fated day in February when she failed to see one tiny patch of ice at the bottom of her brick steps. She landed on her hip. Given her advanced age and being a Caucasian woman at risk for osteoporosis, to no one's surprise, my grandmother broke her right hip.

Fortunately, the break was non-fatal (many are), but it drastically changed her life in other vital ways. No longer could she drive that old push button car of hers. No longer could she dash out to play bridge with her cronies. No longer could she bathe herself or walk from one room to another without intense pain. In one split second, she went from being a confident, independent woman to someone who lost her sense of self-worth – all because of a hidden patch of ice.

According to the National Institute for Health, a direct correlation exists between winter and an increase in falls and fractures for our senior citizens. The elderly are frail to begin with, struggle with vision, and often have balance problems due to illnesses or medications. While a fall does not always end in a fracture, damage to knees, ankles, wrists, and elbows can also incapacitate seniors, resulting in loss of independence and great physical distress.

Since we haven't figured out how to rid ourselves of winter in the Northeast, we must approach this season defensively, both for our seniors and as their caretakers. Here is a list of five practical (and original) ways to make this season of snow and ice one in which we can prevent tragic falls in the first place:

1. First and foremost, shovel steps and driveways, and attack ice and slippery spots with sand and rock salt. Sand increases traction, and salt reduces the ice to water.
2. As obvious as this may sound, no matter what our age, we need to slow down and take our time. During inclement weather, go out only if you absolutely must. Cars can't drive on ice, planes can't fly in it, and humans on ice must tread with the mindfulness of monks, paying close attention to every little step they take.
3. Despite walking with great care, one can still become victim to one slick spot. When walking with seniors, insist that they hold onto handrails (make sure they're sturdy) and also insist that seniors hold on to you. As those bears in hibernation know, four legs are sturdier than two.
4. Make use of aids for seniors, such as non-slip mats, rubber tips for canes and shoes, and cleats or treads that aid in balance and preventing falls.
5. And finally, as silly as this might sound, when you're out on an icy day, walk like a penguin. According to a medical journal in Canada, this technique really works! Bend your knees slightly, keep your arms out to the side for balance, and push your feet so your toes are pointed slightly outward. Remember: penguins have plenty of padding and only slip for fun when they want to!

In the end, when it comes to snow and ice, better to take on the role of monks, tag-team members, or penguins during these winter months rather than lose your health, your independence, and in too many cases, your life.



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