

Quick Guide: Winter Safety

Winter driving

You already know that snow and ice on roads present special problems for the driver. Here are some tips for winter driving in difficult road conditions.

- Have your vehicle in good shape for winter. Be sure your engine coolant mix is correct. Be sure that tires and brakes are in good shape, too.
- You may want to put winter emergency supplies in your trunk. Include an ice scraper, a small brush or broom, a supply of windshield washer fluid, a rag, some winter outer clothing, a shovel, a flashlight, a red cloth, and a couple of reflective warning triangles. And, if you will be driving under severe conditions, include a small bag of sand, a piece of old carpet or a couple of burlap bags to help provide traction, and possibly a set of tire chains.
- Snow tires can help in loose snow, but they may give you less traction on ice than regular tires. Plan ahead that you may hit icy patches when you are driving with snow tires. If you do not expect to be driving in deep snow, but may have to travel over ice, you may not want to switch to snow tires at all.

Winter Walking

- Wear boots or overshoes with soles. Avoid walking in shoes that have smooth surfaces, which increase the risk of slipping.
- Walk consciously. Be alert to the possibility that you could quickly slip on an unseen patch of ice. Avoid the temptation to run to catch a bus or beat traffic when crossing a street.
- Stop, Look and Listen before crossing a street. Vehicles will have a harder time stopping during slippery conditions, and your chances of slipping and falling are greater as well.
- Walk cautiously. Your arms help keep you balanced, so keep hands out of pockets and avoid carrying heavy loads that may cause you to become off balance.
- Walk "small." Avoid an erect, marching posture. Look to see ahead of where you step. When you step on icy areas, take short, shuffling steps, curl your toes under and walk as flatfooted as possible.
- When entering a building, stamp your feet on the mat to remove excess snow.

Cold Stress

How cold is too cold? When the body is unable to warm itself, cold related stress may result. This may include tissue damage and possibly death. Four factors contribute to cold stress: cold air temperatures, high velocity air movement, dampness of the air, and contact with cold water or surfaces. A cold environment forces the body to work harder to maintain its temperature. Cold air, water, and snow all draw heat from the body. Wind chill is the combination of air temperature and wind speed. For example, when the air temperature is 40°F, and the wind speed is 35 mph, your exposed skin receives conditions equivalent to the air temperature being 11° F.

How does the body react to cold conditions? When in a cold environment, most of your body's energy is used to keep your internal temperature warm. Over time, your body will begin to shift blood flow from your extremities (arms and legs) and outer skin to the core (chest and abdomen). This allows exposed skin and the extremities to cool rapidly and increases the risk of frostbite and hypothermia. Combine this with cold water, and trench foot may also be a problem.

