Don’t Fall for Winter

What’s at Stake?

In cold weather conditions, people are usually careful to put winter tires on the car and drive according to road conditions, but they don’t always exercise the same caution when walking across snowy, icy or wet surfaces.

What’s the Danger?

Many falls on snow or ice occur so quickly that the person has no time to react and is on the ground and in pain before realizing what’s happened. Serious injuries and even death may occur when someone’s body crashes onto a snow or ice-covered surface.

Consider this story:

Five minutes late for a critical meeting, Joan scrambles from her car and begins to run across the parking lot. She isn’t thinking about anything except how unimpressed her new boss will be by her lateness. Joan is taken completely by surprise when her legs shoot out from under her and she cracks her head on the icy pavement. Joan was “lucky” to only suffer a concussion. She spent several days on bedrest and suffered from severe headaches during that time.

How to Protect Yourself

Here are 10 ways to keep your feet on the ground during winter.

1. Practice the penguin walk when walking on slippery surfaces; slow down and take smaller steps.
2. Don’t assume that just because you have the right-of-way traffic will or can stop in icy or wet conditions.
    - Many drivers travel too fast for road conditions and can’t stop in time for pedestrians.

    - Others simply can’t stop because the ice makes it impossible to do so.
3. Keep both hands free to help you maintain your balance. Except when using the stairs. Then be sure and use one hand to hold the railing.
4. Watch where you are walking, especially for potential trouble spots such as stairways or ramps.
5. Be careful when stepping into or out of vehicles. Keep a tight grip on hand holds.
6. Immediately report slippery surfaces (sidewalks, parking lots, building entrances).
7. Wear the right footwear for the conditions. Shoes or boots should have slip-resistant soles with plenty of tread.
8. While working at heights in winter conditions, use extreme caution. Ensure that ladder rungs and scaffold decks are kept clear of snow.
9. Don’t take shortcuts across piles of snow or areas that haven’t been cleared and salted/sanded.
10. Once inside, carefully wipe your footwear on the entry mat to remove snow or water.

The steps listed above can help keep you upright on slippery surfaces, but they can’t guarantee that you won’t fall. If you start to fall:

- Avoid putting your arms out to break your fall.
    - You are likely to break an arm or wrist.
    - Instead, relax, go limp and let your thighs, hips and shoulders contact the ground in sequence.
- If you fall backwards, try to keep your head forward (raised) to reduce the chances of striking it on a hard surface.

Final Word

Walking seems automatic, but you can’t afford to be on auto-pilot when walking in winter conditions. Slow down and watch where you are going.