

# Winter Walking – Staying On Your Feet

## Leader's Guide and Quiz

By its very nature, winter walking is a seasonal safety issue, usually limited to several months. Yet thousands of serious injuries happen every winter. And the personal and financial impacts of a wintertime injury can last throughout the year for the individual and for the employer.

### Winter Hazards to be Alert For

**Snow banks** - Snow banks next to sidewalks and parking areas often have packed areas where people have stepped as they cross the bank. These can turn into rounded, slippery depressions. If you step into one of these depressions and hit the sloped edge it's easy to slip and fall.

**Ice patches** - Scattered ice patches on mostly bare, clean pavement can take a person by surprise. During the day the sun can melt snow that forms small puddles in isolated areas. As it turns colder the water can freeze leaving scattered patches of ice on an otherwise perfectly clear area.

**Hidden ice** – It's common to find ice patches under new snow. Since you can't see the ice, it can be especially treacherous.

**Shaded areas** – The sun has tremendous power to melt ice and snow. An area that is free of ice and snow can change to slippery and dangerous as you enter a shaded area. Suddenly you can be walking on glare ice that hasn't been exposed to the sun's melting power.

**Corners** – During most of the year, we don't give a second thought to walking around a corner. But during the winter months a small patch of ice or snow can quickly turn a corner into the scene of an injury.

**Blowing/drifted snow** - Blowing/drifted snow can obscure curbs, potholes, signs, walkways and areas where ice may be under the snow.

**Darkness** – During the winter months it's stays dark later in the morning and gets dark again earlier in the afternoon – times when people are

going to and from work and school. The darkness hides slippery areas in your path. The darkness also makes you less visible to vehicles.

**Vehicle traffic** - Avoid walking in the street if possible. If it is necessary to walk in the street, walk facing oncoming traffic. And use extra caution when crossing the street. Remember that vehicles may have a hard time stopping at intersections. And when a vehicle hits the brakes, they might slide toward the road's edge – where you might be standing. So stay well away from traffic until it has stopped or passed. And pay attention to vehicles as they approach intersections where they have to stop.

**Entering or leaving buildings** – When entering or leaving buildings you can experience a dramatic change in walking surfaces. When entering a building, remember that your footwear may be wet or snowy, which can lead to a nasty slip or fall. Even the smallest amount of snow on the bottom of your footwear can cause a serious slip. Try to use floor mats to remove snow before continuing into the building. And when leaving a building, the walking surface can change dramatically as you go from a warm indoor setting to a cold exterior with slippery areas.

**Carrying loads** – It's important to use extra caution if you have to carry a load while walking on a slippery surface. The load you're carrying decreases your stability and it may block your view, making it more difficult to spot patches of ice or other dangerous surface conditions. This is when you need to use the flat foot walk, while bending your knees slightly. You may also want to turn your body slightly as you walk to get a better view of your path ahead.

## **Techniques to Help You Walk Safely in Winter**

### **Flat-foot walk**

Winter walking is all about making adjustments in our style of walking. The main adjustments are slowing down and adjusting our stride so that our feet come straight down, resulting in a somewhat flat-footed step.

When our feet come straight down they're less likely to slip out from

under us. While you're walking, try to keep your legs tensed a bit. This helps keep your feet stable on a slippery surface.

### **Shorten Stride**

If you're walking in slippery conditions it's also important to shorten our stride. A short stride makes it easier to practice the flat foot walk and prevent slipping. If we take long strides on a slippery surface, our feet will land on the heel and probably lead to a nasty slip and fall.

### **Spread-Foot walk**

In addition to walking with a flat-foot stride, spreading our feet and bending our knees slightly can also add stability. Spreading our feet slightly gives us a wider "base" making it less likely our feet will slip out from under us.

### **Side-foot walk**

Slopes and snow banks are another dangerous condition we can expect to encounter.

If you have to walk on a slope or cross a snow bank, walking carefully sideways, with your feet perpendicular to the slope can help prevent a fall. To get extra grip, plant your feet firmly using the edge of your sole for grip. This can also create a flat surface for your foot to grip. Unless you have a good foothold, avoid walking on a slope with your feet pointed directly up or down the slope. You're likely end up on your seat, rather than on your feet.

### **Hands Free**

Keeping your balance is an important part of safe winter walking. When you're walking on a slippery surface, try to walk with your hands free and out of your pockets if possible. This helps you keep your balance and lets you more quickly break your fall if you do slip. Wearing gloves not only keeps your hands warm, but also will protect your hands if you do slip and fall.

## **Procedures to Help Prevent Winter Slips & Falls**

**Walking on Stairs** – Heavy snow can cover stairways and make it difficult to see where the steps actually are. Don't assume you know where they are. Carefully clear away the snow with your boots so you can see the steps well enough to safely walk on them. Snow can also get

packed on steps so it's deeper at the back of the step than at the front, resulting in a slippery, dangerous slope that you step on. If you are responsible for keeping the stairs clear, shovel them off as soon as possible. Otherwise, kick away some of the packed snow so you have a flat surface to step on. And use the handrails. Hanging onto the handrail can prevent a serious injury if you slip.

**Getting in and out of vehicles** - When you exit or enter a vehicle parked next to a curb or snow bank, there is often a snow-packed slope right next to the vehicle. When you step onto the slope, it is easy for your feet to slip under the vehicle, resulting in a painful, nasty fall. Even on a flat surface you have to use caution getting out of the vehicle when it's slippery. Under normal conditions you would probably swing one foot out of the vehicle and onto the ground and start to stand up while the other foot is still in the vehicle. On a slippery surface it's easy for the foot on the ground to slip out from under the person because the weight of the person isn't pushing straight down. When getting in or out of vehicles, try to place both feet squarely on the ground. Use the vehicle for support and make sure your weight is pressing straight down on your feet as you get in or out. If your weight is pushing down at an angle, the more likely your feet will go out from under you.

If you're getting out of a larger vehicle, such as a delivery truck, use any handgrips and make sure you slowly step from the vehicle, holding onto to the handgrip until both feet are securely on the ground.

If you have to walk around a vehicle, slow down and use the flat foot walk with your feet spread slightly apart. Walking around corners forces your feet toward the outside of the corner. If the surface is slippery, your feet can slip to the side, resulting in a serious fall.

**Clear away snow** – Clear away snow from walkways as soon as possible. The longer it stays, the more likely it's going to get packed down and become slippery.

**Use sand or de-icing agents** – Don't forget to use sand or appropriate de-icing agents on walkways.

**Footwear** - Wear the right footwear for slippery conditions. Rubber soles grip better than leather or plastic. There are also a variety of ice-

gripping devices that can be slipped over boots.

**Visibility** - Don't let heavy clothing, hoods or hats limit your ability to see or hear approaching vehicles, plows, etc. You may have to try extra hard to look for hazards and be aware of your surroundings. And wear clothing that shows up. It is dark longer during the wintertime, so bright colored clothing that reflects vehicle headlights adds protection when you're walking.

**Plan ahead** – Realize that it will take longer to get where you're going when your path is snowy and slippery. Give yourself extra time so you can avoid hurrying.

## Winter Walking Quiz

1. Why do so many people slip and fall in the winter.
  - a. Snow and ice are impossible to walk on
  - b. We often fail to adjust to the winter conditions
  
2. Ways we can adjust for winter conditions include:
  - a. Wearing proper footwear
  - b. Slowing down especially on corners
  - c. Using short strides
  - d. All of the above
  
3. If you fall backwards try to minimize injury by:
  - a. Holding out your arms
  - b. Curling your head and back forward
  
4. If it is necessary to walk in the street, walk facing oncoming traffic.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
5. Why is blowing or drifting snow unsafe?
  - a. It can obscure potholes and other hazards
  - b. It can knock you down
  - c. It could have shards of ice in it
  
6. Which of the following areas often present winter walking hazards?
  - a. Stairs
  - b. Building Entrances
  - c. Curbs
  - d. Shady areas
  - e. All of the above
  
7. Keeping your hands in your pockets will result in better balance on slippery surfaces.
  - a. True
  - b. False

8. Clearing away snow as quickly as possible will help prevent icy surfaces later.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
9. Which technique should be used when stepping off a snowy curb?
  - a. Wide gaited step
  - b. Down but not out technique
  
10. Techniques that help on snow covered stairs include:
  - a. Clear snow with your boots carefully
  - b. Use Handrails
  - c. Jump over snow covered stairs
  - d. Both A & B
  
11. When walking over a snowbank, which is the best walking technique to use?
  - a. Flat-foot walk
  - b. Spread-foot walk
  - c. Side-foot walk
  
12. When exiting a vehicle which of the following is not a proper technique?
  - a. Inspect the surface you are stepping onto
  - b. Step as far from the vehicle as you can reach
  - c. Step lightly and straight down
  - d. Use the vehicle for support

## **Answer Key**

1. B
2. D
3. B
4. A
5. A
6. E
7. B
8. A
9. B
10. D
11. C
12. B