

Winter Guide for Seniors and Caregivers



PRESBYTERIAN
SENIOR LIVING

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Introduction

As we head into the cold, snowy time of the year, we wanted to share some suggestions for navigating the season with older adults and their caregivers. For many, the post-holiday slump combined with the challenging weather can make winter days feel long and lonely. This can contribute to a range of issues, including depression, weight gain, and sleep problems. By taking a proactive approach to winter wellness, both seniors and their care providers may be able to survive and thrive.

Inside This Guide

We will first address some important safety issues that arise when the snow flies, and share reminders for helping aging loved ones to prepare for them. Next, we discuss the mental and physical challenges of winter, and offer suggestions for nurturing the body, mind, and spirit when being stuck indoors much of the time.



Tips for Winter Safety Preparedness

Winter presents unique safety challenges, especially for older adults. You can help a senior loved one by preparing ahead for potential emergencies. Here are a few to be aware of and plan for:

- **Consider Car Safety:** For senior loved ones who are still driving, taking time to be certain their car is winter ready is important. Have the tires, brakes, heater, defrosters, and fluid levels checked. Be sure a long-handled ice scraper is in the car. Keep a winter safety kit in the backseat with essentials the senior might need. A flashlight, a battery-powered cell phone charger, blanket, flares, matches or lighter, protein bars, and bottled water should all be included in the bag.
- **Winterize the Home Front:** If it has not been done already, have the furnace serviced and inspected to optimize operating efficiency and identify any potential problems. Make sure the house has working smoke detectors (it's time to replace those batteries!) and a carbon monoxide detector. Check with the local fire department if assistance is needed with either of these. Line up help for snow removal and salting icy sidewalks and driveway. It's also a good idea to assemble an emergency kit that contains flashlights and extra batteries, blankets, a battery-operated radio, and first aid supplies. A back-up battery-powered charger for the cell phone is important, too.

Tips for Winter Safety Preparedness (cont'd)

- **Stockpile Food:** Winter weather can sometimes make it tough to get out to the grocery store, especially for older adults who might be nervous about driving. One suggestion is to use a corner in the pantry or coat closet to stash nonperishable food items that don't require cooking. Peanut butter, crackers, dried fruit, nuts, and canned meat are a few suggestions. Don't forget a handheld can opener that doesn't require electricity. Also, make sure there is enough bottled water to last at least a week.
- **Refill Medications:** While it's important to stay on top of prescription and over-the-counter medications all year round, winter is definitely no time to let supplies run low. Be sure your loved one refills their medications on time just in case they aren't able to leave home for a few days.
- **Remember the Pets:** When you are stocking up for a possible winter weather emergency, remember to plan for pets too. Put together a box of food and medications for the furry family members. And don't forget the treats!



While no one likes to think the worst will happen, planning ahead can keep the older adults in the family safe while also bringing peace of mind.



Preventing the Winter Blues

Another necessity for enjoying a healthy winter is to find ways to nurture the mind and spirit. When the snow flies, older adults are often forced to spend more time indoors. This can contribute to issues ranging from a case of the blues to more serious conditions like depression or seasonal affective disorder. Consider factoring these prevention tips into the winter planning:

- **Consume Healthy Foods:** When the winter winds blow, it can be tempting to load up on comfort foods. Sugar treats and carbs seem to make you feel better. Some people overindulge in alcohol for the same reason. While these behaviors might make you feel better for a few hours, they can contribute to weight gain and lethargy over time. Instead, try to devise healthy menus and snacks a week or so at a time. Websites and apps like [Oldways](#), [Mealime](#), and [Yummly](#) can help with planning.
- **Stay Connected with Loved Ones:** Isolation is another common issue for older adults in the winter. That's why it's important to stay connected whether a senior loved one lives across town or across the country. Phone calls, video chats, and even handwritten notes can all allow family members to stay in touch when the snow flies. Social media, especially Facebook, can be another avenue to explore. Set up a private family group to make staying in touch easier.

Preventing the Winter Blues (cont'd)



- **Assemble a List of Creative Projects:** Arts and crafts are another good way to nurture the spirit when stuck indoors. Start by creating a list of projects a senior loved one can do by themselves or with a friend or family member, even if it's virtually. Invest in the supplies for several projects that sound like fun, and add to them later. [Pinterest](#) can be a great resource for senior arts and crafts ideas.
- **Enjoy Nature in Your Own Backyard:** The health benefits of connecting with nature are numerous. They range from reduced anxiety and depression to increased feelings of joy. Help make it easier for an older adult to enjoy the great outdoors in the winter, even if it's only from the warmth of the living room. Purchasing a [window-mounted bird feeder](#) is one way to do this. A senior loved one can watch their feathered visitors from inside all winter long. Or consider investing in a [video camera bird feeder](#) that allows a senior family member to watch and listen to their avian friends.

In addition to nurturing the mind and spirit, it's equally important to find ways to engage in physical activity over the long winter. The next section offers ways to help you and your aging loved one do just that.



Staying Fit When You are Stuck Indoors

Winter can present unique challenges to seniors and their caregivers when it comes to working out. Snow and ice might make sidewalks in the neighborhood slippery and walking for exercise too risky. The same is true for roads



and parking lots. While it might be fun to head to the local fitness club for a swim in an indoor pool on a snowy day, not everyone is comfortable driving in the winter. These ideas can help to find and stick with an indoor fitness routine.

- **Agree to Be Workout Buddies:** Whether it's in person or by using a platform like [Zoom](#), one way to increase the odds of sticking with an exercise program during the winter is using the buddy system. Having someone to keep you accountable improves the likelihood you'll both stay on track. Come up with a schedule, even if you have to adjust the days and times each week. Commit to making physical fitness a winter priority.

Staying Fit When You are Stuck Indoors (cont'd)

- **Combine Different Types of Exercise:** Mixing up your exercise routine will not only benefit your overall health, it can also help prevent boredom. Fitness experts say a workout program that incorporates aerobic activity with stretching and light weight training/resistance is best for most people. As is true of any new type of exercise, though, talk with a physician before the senior or anyone else gets started.
- **Practice Senior-friendly Indoor Fitness Activities:** Seniors can get safe and effective exercise from the comfort of their own homes. Seated exercises, such as chair yoga or this [15-Minute Total-Body Chair Workout](#) video, are good to include in your program. A recumbent bike is another option for cold winter days. Light weight training and resistance bands help promote core strength and lower fall risk. Don't forget to devote some time to stretching, too. YouTube is a good resource for free videos on a variety of senior-friendly exercise programs and more.

Conclusion

We hope this short guide gives you and the senior in your life some ideas that will make wintertime healthy and enjoyable this year. If you'd like to explore the topics here in greater detail, we invite you to download [Preparing Your Aging Loved One for Winter: A Winter Survival Guide for Seniors](#). In this free publication, we cover everything from winter home maintenance to preparing for a loss of electricity and beating depression.

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