

# Safely avoid winter driving hazards

Winter can be a beautiful time of year, particularly when freshly fallen snow blankets the landscape. However, winter is also a time fraught with potential peril. The same winter weather that makes landscapes so pristine can make roads and walkways — and even being outside — dangerous.

The U.S. Department of Transportation says weather-related vehicle crashes killed 6,253 people last year and injure more than 480,000 per year. These accidents most often occur when roadways are wet, snowy or icy. Yet, winter driving is not the only seasonal hazard. Here are some common winter activities and how to avoid getting hurt when engaging in them.

## Driving

Exercise extra caution when driving on roadways during the winter, as they may contain ice or snow. All it takes is a small coating of precipitation on roadways to make driving treacherous. Wet-looking roadways may be wet, or they may be covered by ice, and it's difficult to tell the difference with the naked eye. Always slow down and assume you are driving on ice. Make every effort to improve visibility. This includes checking windshield washer fluid levels and ensuring windshield blades are in good working order.

## Snow removal

Shoveling or removing snow by various methods can be strenuous work, taking even those who feel they are in good shape by surprise. A study conducted by researchers at the Center for Injury Research and Policy of The Research Institute

at Nationwide Children's Hospital found that an average of 11,500 snow-shoveling-related injuries and medical emergencies were treated in U.S. emergency departments each year from 1990 to 2006.

Lower back injuries, falls, injuries to the arms and hands and cardiac-related injuries account for many of the incidents sustained while removing snow. There's also the risk of injury from collisions with pedestrians and snow plows. Plows and bobcat-type devices can cause serious injury. Exercise caution when operating such machines.

## Roof snow removal

Removing snow from a roof can be a dangerous prospect. Always use the appropriate equipment, which includes telescoping poles, rather than climbing on slippery roofs. This may be a job best left for a professional, who will have fall-arrest systems and non-slip safety boots.

## Dressing for conditions

Venturing outdoors for winter fun may be enticing, but never put your health at risk for the sake of fun. The Mayo Clinic says hypothermia is a medical emergency that occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce heat, causing a dangerously low body temperature. Wear appropriate clothing to prevent hypothermia, which may not produce any initial symptoms. If shivering stops or confusion and

slurred speech set in, severe hypothermia is in effect and a person should be moved indoors and gently warmed. Mild hypothermia is also possible indoors, typically when the elderly spend several hours in poorly heated homes.

Winter may be beautiful, but it also can be hazardous. Taking precautions and using common sense help avoid dangerous situations.



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