



Connecting Older Adults with Community-based Resources and Options

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**Cold Weather Is Especially Dangerous for Older Adults:
Tips for Staying Warm and Healthy**

The cold temperatures of winter are especially dangerous for older adults. Older people may not be able to feel when they are getting too cold, or they may set their thermostats low to save on heating costs. To prevent hypothermia (very low body temperature), a dangerous and potentially life-threatening condition, the Illinois Department on Aging and the National Institute on Aging offer these tips:

- Ask your doctor if you have any health conditions or take any medications that make it hard for your body to stay warm. At increased risk are older people who take certain medications, drink alcohol, lack proper nutrition and have conditions such as arthritis, stroke, Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease.
- Set your thermostat above 65 degrees; older people are at higher risk of becoming ill during the cold winter months.
- Try to stay away from cold places. Changes in your body that come with aging can make it harder to feel when you are getting cold. It also may be harder for your body to warm itself.
- Wear several layers of *loose* clothing indoors and out. The layers will trap warm air between them. *Tight* clothing can keep your blood from flowing freely, which can lead to loss of body heat. Hypothermia can occur in bed, so wear warm clothing to bed and use blankets.
- Ask friends or neighbors to look in once or twice a day if you live alone. Your area may offer a telephone check-in or personal visit service. Call AgeOptions at (708)383-0258, (800)699-9043 (voice) or (708)524-1653 (TTY) for more information.
- Use alcohol moderately, if at all. Avoid alcohol altogether near bedtime.
- Eat hot foods and drink hot liquids to raise your body temperature and keep warm.
- Keep aware of the daily weather forecast and be sure to dress warmly enough, with hat and gloves, if you must go out. In extremely low temperatures with wind-chill factors, weather forecasters may suggest staying inside.

- Make sure you eat enough food to keep up your weight. If you don't eat well, you might have less fat under your skin, and fat can help protect you by keeping heat in your body. Also, drink 10 glasses of water or other non-alcoholic liquids daily.

Winter Months Come with Higher Risk of Fire and Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Winter months in particular are the peak time for house fires and carbon monoxide poisonings, according to the U.S. Administration on Aging. Most incidents are caused by improper ventilation or malfunctioning heating sources. Even traditional alternative heat sources, such as a fireplace or space heater can be dangerous if not used properly. Be sure to have working smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms on every level of your home and in sleeping areas.

Warming Centers

Keep Warm Illinois has a list of warming centers throughout the state. Go to www.keepwarm.illinois.gov to find a location near you. The site also has tips on staying warm and safe in cold weather and information about assistance with heating bills.

AgeOptions and its network of community agencies are the principal source of information regarding senior services in suburban Cook County, Ill. A nonprofit organization located in Oak Park, AgeOptions has served the older adults of suburban Cook County and their caregivers as an Area Agency on Aging since 1974. For more information, please visit the Agency website at www.ageoptions.org.

AgeOptions connects adults age 60 and over with resources and service options so they can live their lives to the fullest and remain in their homes as long as possible. In 2010 we met the needs of more than 198,500 individuals in 130 communities within 30 townships that have a diverse population of 460,000 older adults. AgeOptions advocates, plans, develops and funds programs and coordinates a network of community-based senior service agencies to ensure an effective and efficient system of service delivery. Support is provided through the Older Americans Act, Illinois General Revenue Funds, local funds and individual contributions.