

Winter safety tips for elderly

Question: Last year, my neighbor experienced difficulties with his health as a result of hypothermia. My 75-year-old grandfather lives on a farm. He still insists on doing a lot of the outdoor chores even in the bitter cold weather. I worry about him. Do you have any information regarding safety tips for older adults who spend time outside during the winter?

Answer: The National Institute on Aging published the booklet "Stay Safe in Cold Weather!" This publication explains older adults can lose body heat more quickly than when they were younger. Being outside in the cold or in a cold house can lead to hypothermia. Hypothermia is what happens when your body temperature gets very low. For older adults, a body temperature colder than 95 degrees can cause various health problems such as heart attack, kidney problems, liver damage or worse.

This booklet provides suggestions from older adults regarding tips for staying warm during the winter in order to lower your chance of getting hypothermia. There is also a detailed list of the signs of hypothermia, which include cold feet and hands, pale skin, slower than normal speech and becoming angry or confused.

The booklet provides tips for treating older adults with possible hypothermia until medical help arrives. There is also a section that describes what medical conditions or medicines can put individuals at a higher risk for hypothermia. There is also a list of resource organizations individuals can turn to for more information.

Call Catholic Charities' Answers for the Aging at 410-646-0100 or 1-888-502-7587 (toll free in Maryland) for a free copy of this easy-to-read booklet or other referral information important to senior citizens.