

## Walk Like a Penguin... and Other December Tips

Based on the weather we had earlier this week, I think some of us are already singing “Oh, the weather outside is frightful”! When we have weather like that - and if we must go outside – we should bundle up and try to stay upright to reduce chances of injuring ourselves.

So, let me start with four tips to reduce falls in winter:

1. Focus on Footwear: Rubber soles, especially those with plenty of tread, provide better traction on snow and ice than either leather or plastic soles, making them the best selection.
2. Beware of Black Ice: It’s just as slippery as regular ice, but difficult to see, making it a top winter safety concern. Stay on clear pathways or ones that have been treated with sand or salt.
3. Make Winter Safety a Priority: Avoid rushing and allow yourself extra time to reach your destination safely. Avoid short-cuts through snow or over icy areas.
4. Walk Like a Penguin: When walking on ground that is slippery with ice or snow – take short, shuffling steps, curl your toes under and walk flatfooted, keep hands free and arms raised from your sides slightly to help with balance.

Let’s all practice walking like a penguin to increase our safety when navigating hazardous icy surfaces! If you need to see how to do this, there are plenty of videos on YouTube – just search “Walk Like a Penguin” and take a look!

Speaking of hazards, December is National Impaired Driving Prevention Month. Beginning in 1981 under President Ronald Reagan, every president of the United States has demonstrated the commitment to preventing impaired driving by proclaiming December as National Drunk & Drugged Driving Prevention Month or, more recently, National Impaired Driving Prevention Month.

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This year, President Biden’s proclamation, on November 30, 2022, summarized the extent of the issue and the reasons for concern: The proclamation stated: “Over 10,000 American lives are lost to drunk and drug-impaired driving each year, accounting for nearly a third of all traffic deaths. In 2019, some 11 percent of Americans drove under the influence, including a staggering 19.6 percent of people aged 21-25 — and that number has only grown since the COVID-19 pandemic began.”

In the proclamation Biden encourages “every American to plan ahead how you will get home after drinking and to be sure that if you have used any substance you never get behind the wheel. Whenever

you see loved ones or colleagues putting themselves or others at risk, step up to offer a hand. Lives depend on it.”

These are wise words as we enter a month with events that often include alcohol. Traffic fatalities that involve impaired drivers increase significantly during the Christmas and New Year’s holiday periods.

If you are hosting or attending holiday parties this year, here are some additional tips from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration that can help prevent dangerous alcohol use and impaired driving, and can help you and your guests to be safe:

1. Be sure to offer plenty of nonalcoholic choices such as sparkling water, fancy juice, soft drinks, and bottled drinking water.
2. Stop serving drinks at least 1 hour before the end of the event. Instead, serve coffee, non-alcoholic beverages and desserts at that time.
3. Recruit designated drivers ahead of time to make sure that everyone has a safe ride home. Be prepared to offer or use other transportation such as cabs or “safe ride” programs in your area; keep the phone numbers of local cab services on hand for yourself and guests.
4. Finally, don’t be afraid to stop a friend or loved one from getting behind the wheel.

On a related note, stress can be a factor for both falls and impaired driving. The Mayo Clinic Staff put together a list of ten “Tips to prevent holiday stress and depression.” Here are two of those tips:

1. Don’t abandon healthy habits - Overindulgence only adds to stress and guilt. So take steps to:
  - Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so that you don’t go overboard on sweets or drinks.
  - Get plenty of sleep.
  - Incorporate regular physical activity into each day.
2. Take a breather - Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm, such as listening to soothing music, getting a massage, or reading a book.

From all of the staff at South Heartland District Health Department: we challenge you to put at least one (hopefully more!) of these tips into practice this December to reduce falls, to prevent impaired driving, and to reduce stress.

We wish you a happy and safe holiday season (and don’t forget to walk like a penguin)!

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