

# Winter survival tips for everything from hypothermia to plants

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Cold weather. Unless your weekends are defined by the amount of white powder on slopes in West Virginia or Pennsylvania, who needs it, right?

If heading for the tropics is out of the question, you might try some coping mechanisms instead.

Here are a few for some of the common problems brought by winter's chill.

## Hypothermia

Yes, winter is cold. And it can kill.

Hypothermia is the sixth most common killer of the elderly. And it strikes others with nearly as much deadly impact.

It is defined as low body temperature (anything below 90 degrees Fahrenheit). Even mildly cold weather can cause hypothermia.

Other symptoms include stomach cold to the touch, a sense of confusion, puffy face and shivering.

What do you do if you come across someone with these symptoms? First, stay calm. Then, get help. Third, cover the person gently, especially the top of their head and neck.

Do not massage arms, legs, or elevate the legs. And, do not give the person hot liquids or alcohol to drink.

The good news about hypothermia is it's preventable. The best prevention is dressing in layers to stay warm, especially the

extremities. Wearing a hat, for example, conserves an enormous amount of body heat - your head is actually like a chimney and, left uncovered, releases body heat.

## Driving On Snow And Ice

Before you even think about how to drive in snow and ice, take a look at your tires.

The Maryland State Police accept radial tires for designated snow emergency routes. In most areas of Maryland, with the possible exception of the Eastern Shore, all-weather tires are preferable. In western Maryland, those designated as "winter" tires are the safest bet.

Techniques for coping with ice differ from car type to type. If your's is a rear-wheel drive car, the old advice about letting up on the accelerator when you hit ice and start to skid still holds. However, if your's is a front-wheel drive vehicle, you're probably better off maintaining throttle or even applying a bit more pressure to the gas pedal.

And now, techniques for braking on rain or ice-slick roads are different, too. The traditional advice was to pump your brakes. Instead, apply light but increasing pressure to brakes, especially disc brakes, until you reach the point that you feel the car beginning to skid - then let up slightly on the brakes.

And what about steering? The traditional advice here was to turn the steering wheel in the direction

of the skid. Now experts say you should turn the wheel in the direction you want to go.

## Saving Your Outdoor Plants

Heavy winter ice and snow, especially the "wet" snows, can do a number on the plants you took out a second mortgage to buy last summer.

Broad leaf evergreens seem to take the worst beating. After a heavy snow, take a broom and head outdoors to brush the snow from those plants. Take care, though, to use the broom to shake the branches, rather than try to "sweep" the plant clean. That could cause damage to the foliage.

If you're in the habit of spreading sand on walks or driveways near outdoor plants, that's fine. But stay away from salt and fertilizers - they can wash off of those surfaces and into the root zones of plants.

## Don't Expect Too Much From Your Fireplace

Precisely when you need the extra heat, that's when your fireplace is the least effective.

On very cold and windy days (temp. range of 20-32°F), a fireplace is likely to draw cold air into the house through cracks and poorly sealed doors or windows.

That forces your furnace to work overtime to furnish the fireplace and living quarters with warmed air.

Windy days can be especially



adept at robbing your home of warm air through the fireplace. If you shut down your fireplace and leave the flue partially open to vent exhaust gases, warm air will be drawn from the house straight up the chimney.

Why? The wind passing over the top of your chimney creates a velocity inside the chimney equal to the windspeed outside. That turns your chimney into a vacuum cleaner, sucking warm air up through the flue.

## Winterize Your Dog

If you have an "outdoors" dog, is it necessary to bring the pooch inside when fall gives way to winter?

Actually, no, so long as you provide proper food and adequate shelter for the dog outside.

Shelter for your best friend

should be water and draft-proof. And it should be large enough to allow the dog to stand, but small enough to conserve heat.

The floor of a dog house should be raised above ground level to keep it dry, and the door should face a direction opposite prevailing winds. If possible, block the wind from the opening and provide a cover for the door.

Don't place blankets in the dog house - they can get wet and freeze. Instead, use dry cedar shavings or shredded newspaper.

Contrary to popular opinion, dogs generally do not need more food in the winter. Actually, maintaining the same nutritious diet you give the animal the remainder of the year is best. And don't forget to provide plenty of clean, ice-free drinking water.

## BACK HOME

By Michelle S. Rodgers

Berks Extension  
Home Economist



### Cabin Fever.

This is about the time of year when a phenomenon commonly known as "cabin fever" often sets in. Symptoms for me include feeling lathargic, depressed and closed in.

At this time of year, we spend much more time indoors than during the more temperate seasons. And between the rain, sleet, snow and freezing temperatures it is a real effort to get dressed to go outdoors. Add two or more children to the get-ready list, another four mittens, two pair of boots and ski caps and you've just spent another half hour getting ready to go out. Result: we stay inside and develop varying stages of cabin fever.

However, we can prevent or at least alleviate some cabin fever by creatively capturing a few snatches of time. Start off your list by planning one specific outing at least once a week. Preferably, this event will be something fun rather than something that has to be done. Even just going for a walk while pulling the kids on a sled may do. And if you don't have any kids to walk, then take the dog. Our puppy loves the snow and her antics in the white powder are usually good for a few laughs. (One of the best medicines for this fever!)

Another way to brighten the winter days is to plant some spring bulbs in an pot, add some sunshine and water and you'll have a touch of spring in a few weeks. It's mentally refreshing just to see

some bright green shoots pushing their way skyward and breaking into blossom.

Dig in the closet and pull out those old board games that you haven't played for years. Recently, while "child-sitting," I challenged the kids to bring along their old games. We filled several hours re-learning *Candy Land*, *Shoots and Ladders*, and even challenged ourselves with *Go to the Head of the Class*. And while you are finding the old games, clean out the closet. You'll be one closet ahead on the spring housecleaning, and that's a great feeling.

Now is also the time to do something for someone else. At this time of year, many families have a little more time to visit that neighbor, grandparent or friend. Prepare some bread or cookies to share with someone special.

Read, read, read. Visit the closest library and freshen your mind with new thoughts and characters. Check the library for a story hour that your children can attend. One of my favorite winter activities is curling up with a cup of tea, an afghan and a good book. It's not always possible to sit for hours doing that, but even a half hour is refreshing.

Fortunately, cabin fever is curable. A dose of one of the above ideas should alleviate some of the symptoms. Take a moment now and jot down a few more ideas for yourself and for your family. Let's wipe out cabin fever before it spreads!

## Buckle up for National Child Passenger Safety Awareness Week

ARDMORE — National Child Passenger Safety Awareness Week will be observed in Pennsylvania from Feb. 23 through March 1. Governor Thornburgh will be proclaiming the week as a time for residents to be commended for protecting their young children. The mayors of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia will participate in ceremonies opening the week in their respective cities.

During this specially designated week state and local police will be participating in looking for families that are buckling up their children. If spotted, these parents will receive a special commendation from PennDOT for

caring enough to protect their child's safety in the car.

Act 53, the Pennsylvania Child Passenger Protection Law, mandates that every child from birth to age four must be restrained in an approved car seat when riding in an automobile. Children one to four years have the option of riding with seatbelts in the back seat.

According to the Pennsylvania Child Passenger Safety Project, 60 percent of all young children are now being buckled up by their parents. However, using the carseats correctly is still a problem.

Many parents do not take the

time to secure the harness snug, to route the seatbelt through the car seat frame in the correct spot, or to face an infant seat towards the rear of the auto. Re-reading the manufacturer's directions and taking the few extra seconds to secure the seat properly is critical to assure adequate protection for the child.

Currently, Pennsylvania has 230 car seat loaner programs providing 15,000 car seats to citizens at a nominal rental fee. Families can obtain information about a loan program near them by calling 1-800-CAR BELT.

For more information call the Child Passenger Safety Project at 1-800-CAR BELT.

## Extension specialist lists strategies for life transitions

STATE COLLEGE — Dr. Barbara W. Davis, Extension specialist in adult development and aging at Penn State University, recently gave a presentation in New Orleans at the 38th annual scientific meeting of the Gerontological Society of America.

Davis addressed the strategies employed by the Cooperative Extension Service in educating people for mid and later life transitions. She gave an overview

of Extension programs being used throughout the country to help adults and their families deal with major transitions that commonly occur during middle age and later years.

Davis has developed strategies to help adults and their families cope with mid-life reassessments; adapt to living alone as a result of separation, divorce or widowhood; and manage shifts of the independence/dependence balance

as family members grow older.

Davis and two other gerontology specialists from the Extension service in Oregon and Texas, described educational programs and resources that reach across the generations to help ease transitions for the young as well as the elderly in growing families. The group also discussed ways to more effectively link Extension programs with other community groups and health care facilities.

## Family Living

