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## Winter Hazards: Protect Yourself

Winter in Nebraska brings its share of special challenges to health and safety that are not considered in other seasons. Here is your reminder to pay attention to these top winter health hazards:

- “Seasonal funk” and “winter blues” are common this time of year. [Seasonal Affective Disorder](#) (SAD) is more than a funk. SAD is a real, genuine type of depression that can sap energy and create moodiness during the cold winter months. Symptoms of SAD can include irritability, feeling sluggish, having problems sleeping, weight gain, appetite changes, and general anxiety or depression. With age and limited time outside in the winter, the light that is needed to keep a body regulated is in short supply. Making an appointment with a physician or psychologist for these symptoms does not label a person as weak. It is simply seeking an answer to the temporary “Nebraska winter blues” which truly messes with a person’s mind and body.
- [Cold and flu viruses](#) are abundant now, and the best way to protect yourself is with consistent hand-washing, avoiding contact with surfaces in public. If a surface or another person’s skin is touched in a handshake, for example, be careful to not touch eyes, nose, or mouth until hands are thoroughly washed. For those with a cold or flu virus, it is your responsibility to keep germs from spreading. Staying home is the best option, and always cough into a sleeve. Other factors that will boost immunity against viruses are getting plenty of sleep, exercising, and eating healthy foods. The last recommendation is to reduce stress levels, which is a direct result of the previous advice, so just doing those things will help lower stress!
- According to the [National Safety Council](#) (NSC), 25,000 slips, trips, and falls occur daily in the United States. Snow, ice, and freezing temperatures multiply the number of surfaces out there that can wreak havoc. Avoid slips and falls by staying away from any surface that appears to look wet or slick, even indoors, and wear appropriate footwear.
- Again from the [NSC](#), the accident rate on black ice can be up to five times higher than on dry surfaces, and stopping distance in a vehicle on ice is almost 10 times that of stopping on dry surfaces.
- The [American Heart Association](#) warns about shoveling snow: It can put some people at risk of heart attack. Sudden exertion, such as moving heavy snow after being sedentary for several months, can put a strain on the heart. Cold weather can increase blood pressure and decrease blood supply, even in healthy people. Individuals over the age of 40 or who are relatively inactive should be particularly careful.
- Just because the heat is gone doesn’t mean a body needs less water! [Staying hydrated](#) is an easy, yet effective, way to stay healthier this winter. Avoid chapped lips and fatigue just by drinking non-alcoholic beverages and even loading up on fruits and vegetables or soups that also provide vital fluids.

Nebraska Extension cares about you. Stay safe and healthy this winter! For more information on health and safety, contact [susan.harris@unl.edu](mailto:susan.harris@unl.edu).