



Home Health Care:

Tips for Slip and Fall Prevention

Home Health Care workers providing care to patients at their homes during the winter are exposed to varying types of slip, trip and fall hazards. The type of footwear chosen by employees can make a big difference in reducing the risk of a fall.

Here are a number of items that should be considered when selecting footwear and walking up to a patient's home:

- **Footwear Selection:** When purchasing footwear, select a type that is meant for winter walking conditions. The sole should be a non-skid, treaded composite material; not a smooth, non-treaded material made of plastic or leather. They should be water repellant to keep your feet warm and dry. Select a pair that will provide ankle support when walking on uneven ground.
- **Outdoor/Indoor Footwear:** Outdoor boots will offer the best traction when walking from the vehicle to the home. These may be bulky to wear inside the home, so take along an indoor pair of shoes that you can change into.
- **Pull Over Ice Grippers:** When ice or slippery conditions are present, consider the use of pull over ice grippers to offer additional traction.
- **Parking Vehicle:** If possible, choose a parking spot with good lighting and that is clear of snow and ice.

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Useful Resources:

- <https://www.YakTrax.com>
- <http://www.winterwalking.com>
- <http://www.Wikihow.com/Fall-Safely>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/healthcare/>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docket/archive/pdfs/NIOSH-114/0114-NIOSHPublication2010-125.pdf>

For more information on this topic and more, visit www.UnitedHeartland.com/walksafe or contact your UH Loss Control representative today.

- **Exiting and Entering Vehicles:** Use special care when exiting vehicles. Pivot in the seat and place both feet on the ground before standing to obtain more stability. Use the door and vehicle frame to grab onto for stability when exiting and entering the vehicle (i.e., minimum 3 point contact). You can also use the vehicle for support when walking towards the home. When re-entering the vehicle, sit down on the seat first with both feet on the ground, then bring legs into the vehicle.
- **Snow and Ice Accumulation:** Because of their medical condition, the patient or their family may not be able to clear the snow and ice from their driveway and walkways before you arrive. Use caution when approaching the home; sidewalks, steps and entryways may be slippery. Proactively, have a discussion with the patient and family prior to winter to develop a plan for snow/ice removal.
- **Shovel:** Although snow removal is normally not a part of the job description, having a small shovel on hand could be useful to access a home following a recent snowfall. Ice melters are beneficial to apply to the walking route as well.
- **Poor Lighting/Darkness:** Move slower in the early morning or evening when you cannot see as well. Pay more attention to your travel path looking for changes in grade, ice patches, rocks, holes and cracks.
- **Stairs and Handrails:** Inspect stairs at the patient's house during the intake interview. Make sure they are in good repair and have handrails. Always use a handrail. Use extreme caution if snow and ice are built up on the stairs.
- **Carrying Materials and Supplies:** Carrying items increases the chance for a fall because your arms are occupied and cannot be used for balance. Use a rolling bag to transport the items from the vehicle into the home.
- **Entering the Home:** When entering a home or building, remove as much snow and water from your boots as possible. Dry the bottom of the shoes on an entry way floor mat, if available. Take notice that floors and stairs may be wet and slippery. Walk carefully.
- **Inside the Home:** Within patient homes, be aware of hazards such as wet floors, loose rugs and cords. Examine the walking path throughout the home for these hazards.
- **Fall Technique Tips:** No one wants to fall, but preparing for it ahead of time could help reduce the extent of injuries.
 - If falling forward or sideways, bend at the knees and waist to reduce the height of the fall. Distribute the force by rolling along your thigh, waist and side of body. Lastly, use your arms to protect your head from striking the ground by reaching slightly forward with palms making contact with the ground. Try to avoid catching your fall with your arm straight out.
 - If falling backward, bend at the knees and waist to reduce the height of the fall. Tuck your chin or place one hand behind your head to protect it from striking the ground. Attempt to sit down rather than striking the ground with the flat of the back or head.

