



Don't Let Winter Weather Bring You Down, Prevent Falls

The winter months are here and so is winter weather. Winter weather brings an increased risk for falls, especially among older adults. A fall can have negative health effects on a senior adult, ranging from a temporary loss of independence to a move to an assisted living facility, or even death. Fortunately, falls and fall-related injuries can be prevented.

Slippery surfaces are especially hazardous for senior adults due to an increased risk of balance problems and muscle weakness. By

the time a person reaches 80 years of age, muscle strength can decrease by half if it is not maintained. The good news is that muscle strength can be restored at any age by being physically active on a regular basis. There are multiple types of physical activity that can help reduce the risk of falling



*William "BJ" Jetter, Ph.D.
MIFireE is the Fire Chief for
Sycamore Township and a
member of the Hamilton
County Fall Prevention Task
Force*

- *Tai Chi* is an ancient Asian form of physical activity that focuses on building and maintaining balance and flexibility. It has been heavily studied and found to be helpful in preventing seniors from falling. Many senior centers and health clubs in Hamilton County offer Tai Chi classes a very low cost.
- Building muscle strength can help prevent falling. The Hamilton County General Health District has partnered with many senior centers, retirement communities and churches to offer strength training classes to the public. *Resisting Muscle Loss* is a strength-training program for people of all activity levels and exercises can be modified to meet individual needs. For a listing of Resisting Muscle Loss or other strength training classes in your area, call 946-7820 or visit www.hamiltoncountyhealth.org.
- *Water aerobics* is another form of physical activity that senior adults with arthritis or other joint conditions enjoy because of its therapeutic effects.

There are other preventive measures you can take to avoid falling or slipping on a slippery surface.

- Make sure that the path to your door, garage and mailbox are shoveled and free of debris.
- If walkways are icy, melt down the ice by sprinkling salt over the slippery area or cover the ice with something gritty or non-slippery. Remember, the thicker the ice, the longer it takes to melt. Ideally you should sprinkle salt before or

immediately after a storm, especially in areas of the driveway or sidewalk you know are prone to being icy.

- Allow yourself plenty of time to get where you need to go in winter weather. Taking your time will reduce your risk of falling, especially if you use an assistive walking device.
- Dress for the weather! If you do happen to fall, it is important to stay as warm as possible while you wait for help to arrive.

For more information about fall prevention, visit www.fallpreventiontaskforce.org or call 946-7845. The Web site offers fall prevention information for seniors, families, caregivers and healthcare providers, as well as useful literature and tools designed to identify those who may be at risk for falling.