



## **Staying Safe in Winter with a TBI**

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Winter can be a time of very cold weather, heavy snowfall, and icy streets. This can lead to a higher risk of falls, especially for people with traumatic brain injuries (TBI). Problems with attention, decision-making, balance, and more can make falls more likely. This may cause people with a TBI or their caregivers to fear going outside in the winter. The good news is that there are many ways to help people stay safe and lower the risk of falls in winter weather.

### **Safety tips for people who have a TBI:**

- Plan ahead! If there is a forecast of snow or bad weather, plan to stay indoors. If there is heavy snowfall or ice in your area, wait for sidewalks to be cleared and salted before venturing outside.
- Clear snow and ice from walkways around your home, or find someone to do this for you. Make sure that salt is put down on all outdoor walking paths.
- Wear well-fitting boots that provide good traction.
- Use your cane or walker, if you have one, and walk slowly.
- Use handrails whenever possible.
- Walk in places with good lighting. This will help you see better and avoid icy spots.
- Avoid risky tasks. Your outdoor to-do list can wait!
- Increase safety in your indoor space. Put down non-slip mats near entrances to your home to prevent slippery floors.
- Remember to check the weather and the temperature. Sometimes it is icy even if it doesn't snow!

### **Tips for caregivers:**

- Offer help and options, The key word here is *offer*. It's important to respect the person's independence, control, and choice.
- Encourage the person to stay indoors when conditions outside are dangerous for them. Help them think of fun or relaxing activities they can do at home until outdoor conditions improve.
- Try to ensure that outdoor walkways are cleared, salted, and well-lighted.
- Provide easy-to-read lists and reminders of safety tips. Reminders in their phone or post-it notes on their wall can be helpful. The more colorful and eye-catching, the better!

- When accompanying someone with a TBI outdoors in winter, ensure that they are wearing appropriate footwear and that they have any needed mobility aids such as a cane or walker.
- Encourage them to keep their hands free so they can utilize handrails. They may benefit from using a backpack to carry materials and help maintain balance.
- Be prepared in case the person falls or injures themselves outdoors. Carry a cell phone at all times with a list of numbers you might need in an emergency.

Winter weather can lead to a lot of anxiety and stress. A little advance preparation can help people with TBIs stay safe and comfortable once the winter weather arrives. For more information about brain injury and how to help, please visit the Brain Injury Association of America at <https://biausa.org/>.

*Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA's Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then "Resources" and then "Public Resources". PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.*