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## 5 cold-weather health hazards, and how to stay safe



We're just a month into winter and already the nation has had record-breaking snow, winds, and low temperatures. And while the crisp air and snow-covered trees can paint a pleasant wintry picture, cold weather can also bring with it some [not-so-pleasant dangers](#). Frigid temperatures can pose risks for illness and injury for everyone, but particularly vulnerable populations are young children, older adults, and the chronically ill. Here are some top cold-weather dangers to be aware of, and some smart ways to protect yourself and your family:

### 4. Depression

About 5 percent of Americans, three-quarters of them women, experience [seasonal affective disorder](#) (SAD) each year, a type of depression that typically occurs during the cold-weather months.

**Signs to watch for:** Some symptoms are similar to those associated with other types of depression: sadness, fatigue, excessive sleepiness, social withdrawal, and trouble concentrating. But people with SAD also tend to move slowly, crave carbohydrates, and gain weight. And they're less likely than people with conventional depression to have feelings of worthlessness or thoughts of suicide.

**Stay-safe tips:** If suspect you're suffering from SAD, the nonprofit Center for Environmental Therapeutics has an [online questionnaire](#) that can help you determine whether you have it. For mild cases, doing 60 minutes of outdoor aerobic exercise in the morning might bring some relief. For more persistent cases, talk to our doctor about therapies, including light therapy and [antidepressants](#). Other treatment options include cognitive-behavioral therapy, in which you learn to ward off negative thoughts about the season and work on finding enjoyable activities. That kind of therapy might also help prevent a recurrence.

—Ginger Skinner

