



Winter Wellness for Older Adults

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Outline

- **Why we are here**
- Be prepared!
- Take care of yourself
- At home
- Out and about
- Emergency contact
- Enjoy winter!
- Resources
- Your turn

Why we are here

1. There is a problem

- Winter's impact on older adults is a public health issue
- Allegheny County has the higher % of older adults exposed to winter of any county in America
 - (282,694—22.1%) over 60
 - (228,416—17.8%) over 65
- Winter can be hazardous to your health!
 - *People die more in winter.* mortality increases by 15-20%
 - *People get sick more in winter.* morbidity increases (especially from cardiac, respiratory causes and accidents)
 - *For many, life is not as good in winter.* quality of life may decrease

2. We can do something about it

- Much of this is preventable
- We can teach each other how

“Eco-social model”

Factors influencing health are at multiple levels:

- Individual (genetics, knowledge, behavior)
- Family
- Physical environment (house, neighborhood)
- Community (friends and neighbors, mail carrier, store clerk, etc.)
- Organizations (SCP, GSPH, AAA, ACHD)
- Government and policy (energy and utility policy)

Each level has opportunities for intervention

Winter in Pennsylvania

- Weather: cold, ice, snow, darkness
- Nature: fewer signs of life
- People: more time inside, harder to get around

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Be prepared for winter!

- Prepare yourself
- Prepare your home
- Prepare your car

Prepare yourself for winter

- Warm clothes
- Medicines and medical check-up
- Flu and pneumonia shots
- Set goals with timelines (April 1?)
- Plan activities (including exercise)
- Sign up for utility and weatherization help
- Prepare emergency contacts and “buddy system”

Prepare Your Home for Winter

- Insulate water lines that run along exterior walls.
- Have your furnace inspected for safety and efficiency.
- Have your chimney and flue inspected if you intend to use a fireplace or woodstove
- Install smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors. Test them monthly, and replace batteries twice yearly.

More tips to reduce heating costs and stay warm

- Change furnace disposable filters before you turn it on for the winter and several times during the season.
- Insulate attics, walls, floors over unfinished basements to proper R-values.
- Consider insulated doors, thermal-pane windows, storm windows and doors
- Add weather-stripping and caulking to windows and doors, or put plastic over windows. Add a door sweep.
- Lower your water heater's thermostat setting to 120 °.
- Install a low-flow showerhead to save on hot water.
- Use the passive solar energy of your home by opening drapes and blinds during the day. Close them at night to retain heat.
- Set the thermostat for 72° in the daytime and to 65 ° at night.
- Lower your thermostat when you are not going to be at home.
- Consider installing a programmable thermostat.
- Close off unoccupied rooms and close heating vents in them.
- Close the damper on your fireplace when it is not in use
- Take showers instead of baths.
- Wear layers of clothing or insulated clothing indoors.
- Put extra blankets or a comforter on your bed.
- Wash clothes in cold or warm water instead of hot.

Winter Home Emergency Supplies List

- an alternate way to heat your home during a power failure:
 - dry firewood for a fireplace or wood stove, or
 - kerosene for a kerosene heater
- furnace fuel (coal, propane, or oil)
- electric space heater with automatic shut-off switch and non-glowing elements
- blankets
- matches
- multipurpose, dry-chemical fire extinguisher
- first aid kit and instruction manual
- flashlight or battery-powered lantern
- battery-powered radio
- battery-powered clock or watch
- extra batteries
- non-electric can opener
- snow shovel
- rock salt
- special needs items (hearing aid batteries, medications, etc.)

Home Winter Survival Kit

- Several days' supply of food that needs no cooking or refrigeration, such as bread, crackers, cereal, canned foods, and dried fruits.
- Water stored in clean containers, or purchased bottled water (5 gallons per person) in case your water pipes freeze and rupture.
- Medicines that any family member may need.

Prepare Your Car for Winter

- Have maintenance service on your vehicle as often as the manufacturer recommends.
- Have the radiator system serviced, or check the antifreeze level yourself with an antifreeze tester. Add antifreeze, as needed.
- Replace windshield-wiper fluid with a wintertime mixture.
- Replace any worn tires, and check the air pressure in the tires.
- During winter, keep the gas tank near full to help avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines.
- Emergency kit: see handout

Outline

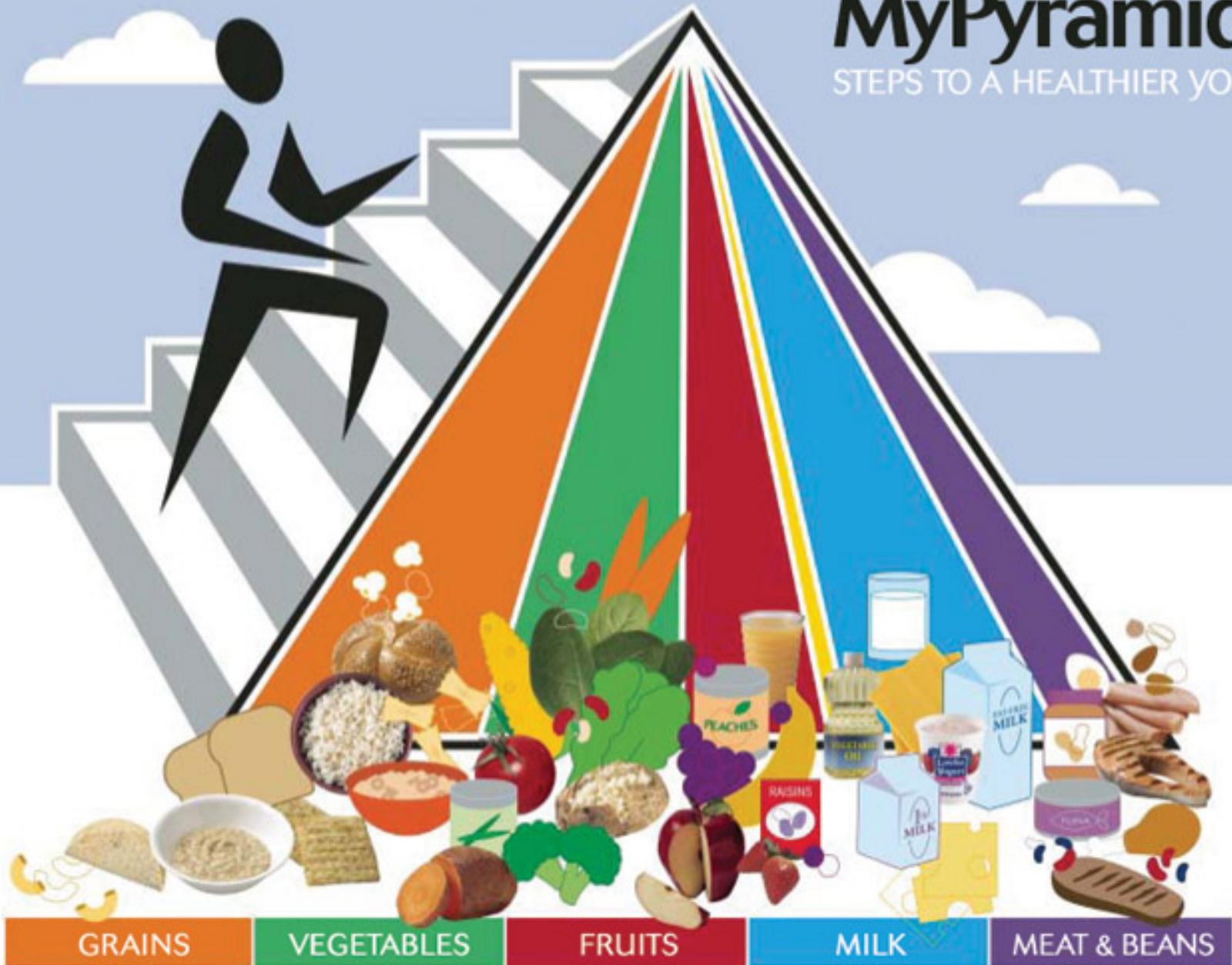
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Take care of yourself

- Stay active
- Eat right
- Assess your medical needs
- Vaccinations
- Watch out for
 - Falls (inside and out)
 - Car accidents
 - Hypothermia and frostbite
 - Cold stress
 - Respiratory infections
 - Carbon monoxide
 - Fire
 - Depression

MyPyramid

STEPS TO A HEALTHIER YOU



Winter nutrition

- “Holiday heart”
- In extreme cold
 - Eating well-balanced meals helps you stay warm.
 - Alcoholic and caffeine cause heat loss.
 - Warm foods, cider and soup can help keep you warm.

Hypothermia

- Body exposed to cold loses heat faster than it can be produced.
- Low body temperature affects the brain
- Warning signs:
 - shivering, exhaustion
 - confusion, fumbling hands
 - memory loss, slurred speech
 - drowsiness
- If you notice any of these signs and the person's temperature is below 95°, call 911.
- If medical care is not available, begin warming:
 - Get the victim into a warm room or shelter.
 - Remove any wet clothing.
 - Warm the torso and head first using an electric blanket, or loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets.
 - Warm, non-alcoholic beverages if person is alert
- In some cases, hypothermia victims who appear to be dead can be successfully resuscitated.

Frostbite

- Most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, or toes.
- Can lead to permanent damage and even amputation.
- Get out of the cold or protect exposed skin at the first signs of redness or pain.
- Seek medical care if cold leads to
 - a white or grayish-yellow skin area
 - skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
 - numbness (victim is often unaware)

Colds and flu

- Pneumovax and flu vaccines
- Isolation vs. infection

The Winter Blues

- More tired, sad, sleep more, changes in appetite, apathy, loss of concentration, irritability...
- Getting involved in different activities and keeping busy can help maintain a healthy emotional balance
- Seasonal Affective Disorder and light therapy

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At home

- Stay warm
- Assess and improve your indoor environment
- CBPR?

Assessing the indoor environment

- Insulation and ventilation
 - Temperature
 - Humidity
 - Indoor air pollution
 - Cigarette smoke
 - Carbon monoxide
 - Molds
 - Dust
- Cleanliness and clutter
- Lighting
- Plants

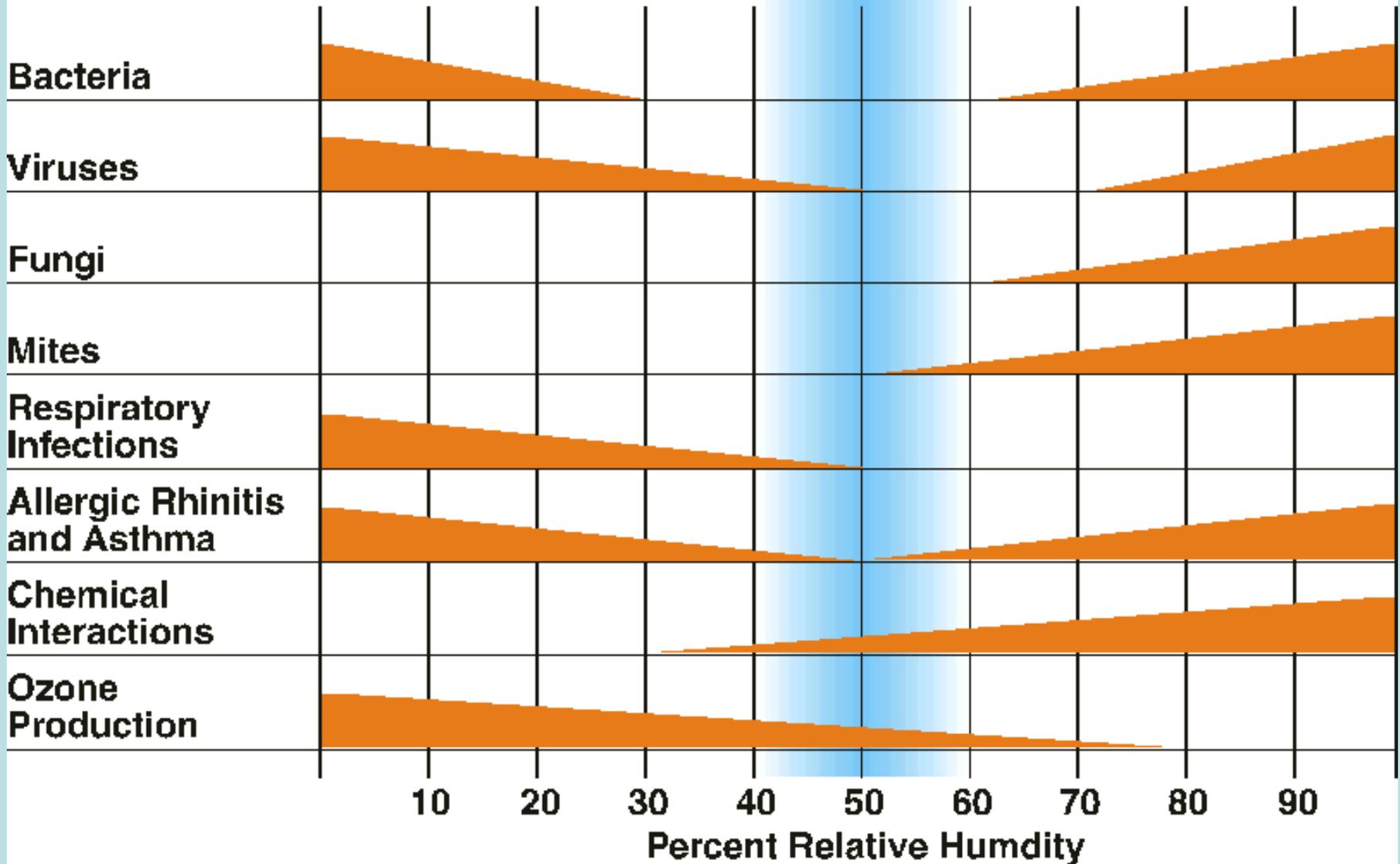
Temperature

- Older adults often make less body heat because of a slower metabolism and less physical activity.
- Ability to feel a change in temperature decreases with age
- Older people are more susceptible to health problems caused by cold.
- Place an easy-to-read thermometer in an indoor location where you will see it frequently, and check the temperature of your home often.

Humidity

Decrease in bar width indicates decrease in effect

Optimum Zone



If you plan to use a wood stove, fireplace, or space heater

- Use fireplace, wood stoves, or other combustion heaters only if they are properly vented to the outside and do not leak flue gas into the indoor air space.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions
- Do not burn paper in a fireplace.
- Ensure adequate ventilation if you must use a kerosene heater.
- Use only the type of fuel your heater is designed to use—don't substitute.
- Do not place a space heater within 3 feet of anything that may catch on fire, such as drapes, furniture, or bedding, and never cover your space heater.
- Never place a space heater on top of furniture or near water.
- Never leave children unattended near a space heater.
- Make sure that the cord of an electric space heater is not a tripping hazard but do not run the cord under carpets or rugs.
- Avoid using extension cords to plug in your space heater.
- If your space heater has a damaged electrical cord or produces sparks, do not use it.
- Store a multipurpose, dry-chemical fire extinguisher near the area to be heated.
- Protect yourself from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning by installing a battery-operated CO detector
- Never use generators, grills, camp stoves, or similar devices indoors.

In Extremely Cold Weather

- Avoid unnecessary opening of doors or windows.
- Close off unneeded rooms, stuff towels or rags in cracks under doors, and close draperies or cover windows with blankets at night.
- Listen to weather forecasts regularly, and check your emergency supplies whenever a period of extreme cold is predicted.
- Bring pets indoors or provide adequate shelter to keep them warm. Make sure that they have access to unfrozen water.
- Ensure fresh air coming in for your heater or for emergency cooking arrangements.

Avoid freezing pipes when very cold temperatures are expected

- Leave all water taps slightly open so they drip continuously.
- Keep the indoor temperature warm.
- Improve the circulation of heated air near pipes (doors under the kitchen sink, etc.).
- Thaw frozen pipes slowly with an electric hair dryer.

If you have a power failure

- Use battery-powered flashlights or lanterns rather than candles, if possible.
- Never leave lit candles unattended.
- Never use a charcoal or gas grill indoors.
- Never use an electric generator indoors, inside the garage, or near the air intake of your house
- Plug in appliances to the generator using individual heavy-duty, outdoor-rated cords.
- Do not use the generator or appliances if they are wet.
- Do not store gasoline indoors where the fumes could ignite.

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Outdoor Safety in Winter

- **Avoid Exertion**
 - Cold weather puts an extra strain on the heart.
 - Follow your doctor's advice about shoveling snow or performing other hard work in the cold.
 - Dress warmly and work slowly.
 - Your body is already working hard just to stay warm: don't overdo it!
- **Avoid Ice**
 - Keep your steps and walkways as free of ice as possible using rock salt, chemical de-icing compound, sand.
- **Avoid extreme cold**
 - Stay indoors. Make any trips outside as brief as possible
- **Listen to radio or television for National Weather Service advisories.**

Wind Chill Factor

Actual air temperature °F

calm 40 30 20 10 0 -10 -20 -30 -40

Apparent temperature

<i>10</i>	34	21	9	-4	-16	-28	-41	-53	-66
<i>20</i>	30	17	4	-9	-22	-35	-48	-61	-74
<i>30</i>	28	15	1	-12	-26	-39	-53	-67	-80
<i>40</i>	27	13	-1	-15	-29	-43	-57	-71	-84
<i>50</i>	26	12	-3	-17	-31	-45	-60	-74	-88
<i>60</i>	25	10	-4	-19	-33	-48	-62	-76	-91

Frostbite times:



30 minutes



10 minutes



5 minutes

Dress Warmly and Stay Dry

- **Wear**
 - **several layers of loose-fitting clothing**
 - **outer layer: tightly woven, preferably wind resistant.**
 - **inner layers: polypropylene holds more body heat than cotton.**
 - **hat**
 - **scarf or knit mask to cover face and mouth**
 - **sleeves that are snug at the wrist**
 - **mittens (warmer than gloves)**
 - **water-resistant coat and boots**
- **Stay dry—wet clothing chills the body rapidly.**
- **Excess perspiration will increase heat loss, so remove extra layers of clothing whenever you feel too warm. Also, avoid getting gasoline or alcohol on your skin.**
- **Persistent shivering is a signal to return indoors.**

If You Get Stranded

- **Staying in your vehicle when stranded is often the safest choice on an icy road.**
- **Tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna as a signal to rescuers and raise the hood of the car (if it is not snowing).**
- **Move anything you need from the trunk into the passenger area.**
- **Make sure that snow is not blocking the exhaust pipe.**
- **Wrap your entire body, including your head, in extra clothing, blankets, or newspapers.**
- **Stay awake.**
- **Run the motor (and heater) for about 10 minutes per hour, opening one window slightly to let in air.**
- **As you sit, keep moving your arms and legs to improve your circulation and stay warmer.**
- **Do not eat unmelted snow: it will lower your body temperature.**
- **Huddle with other people for warmth.**

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Emergency contact

- Have communications available (telephone, internet, radio, television)
- “Buddy system”
- Check on elderly friends and neighbors frequently to ensure that their homes are adequately heated.
- Postal worker and other check-in services
- If the temperature cannot be maintained, make temporary arrangements to stay elsewhere

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Enjoy winter!

- Start or pursue a hobby (sewing, woodworking, ceramics, quilting, letter writing, painting, indoor gardening...).
- Invite friends or family to dinner (potluck?).
- Create a scrapbook (photos, family tree, birth and marriage certificates, stories, memories).
- Develop a newsletter with friends or family. Have participants send pictures, letters and stories to be highlighted in each edition.
- Get involved in community outreach activities.
- Visit a local senior center to get out and meet people.
- Join health promotion programs, exercise classes, walking clubs
- Develop a home exercise routine
- Destinations: Phipps Conservancy, malls, other warm places to walk...?

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Energy and Weatherization Assistance Resources

- **Budget Billing**
- **CAPs**
- **Customer Assistance Referral and Evaluation Program (CARES)**
- **Low-Income Usage Reduction Program (LIURP)**
- **Hardship funds**
- **LIHEAP**

Budget Billing

- All residential customers may contact their electric or natural gas company and request budget billing at any time. Each monthly bill will be the same amount. The company may adjust the bill four times a year, up or down, depending on the customer's usage.

Customer Assistance Programs (CAPs)

- CAPs can lower your monthly utility bill. CAPs may also remove the amount you already owe. Utility companies work with the customer to determine what the customer can pay verses the cost of energy used.

Customer Assistance Referral and Evaluation Program (CARES)

- CARES helps customers with special needs. CARES may help you find ways to pay your utility bill. For example, special needs are customers who are experiencing family emergencies, divorce, unemployment, or medical emergencies. The goal is to provide support and direction to help customers pay their utility bills.

Hardship Funds

- Hardship funds from utility companies provide cash assistance to utility customers to help them pay their utility bills. Hardship funds provide assistance grants to customers who "fall through the cracks" of other financial assistance programs, or to those who still have a critical need for assistance after the other resources have been exhausted. The funds make payments directly to companies on behalf of eligible customers.

Low-Income Usage Reduction Program (LIURP)

- **LIURP** helps low-income residential customers lower the amount of electricity or natural gas used each month. Typically, the company may install energy saving features in your home to help reduce bills. For example, smaller bills means your payment covers a greater portion of the bill, or perhaps covers the whole bill.

LIHEAP

- Federal program that provides financial assistance to needy households for home energy bills. In Pennsylvania, the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) administers the LIHEAP program. The LIHEAP program provides both cash and crisis benefits to low-income households. Cash benefits help low-income customers pay for their home energy needs while crisis payments help meet emergency home energy situations.

Resource Contacts

- StayWarmPA.com
- Assistance with heating bills
 - LIHEAP: (Cash) (412) 562-0330
 - LIHEAP for Columbia Gas (CAP)(800) 272-2714
 - LIHEAP for Equitable Gas (EAP)(800) 644-8090
 - LIHEAP: (Crisis) 800-851-3838.
- Utility Assistance Programs
 - Allegheny Power (LIPURP) (800) 207-1250
 - Duquesne (CAP) (800) 393-7600
 - Columbia (CAP) (800) 537-7431
 - Equitable (EAP) (412) 395-3050
- Assistance with weatherization
 - Action-Housing, Inc. (412) 281-2102
 - Steel Valley Opportunities Industrialization Center (412) 678-8622
- Allegheny County AAA (412) 350-4234

What did I miss?

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Your turn

- How does winter affect you?
- How does it affect the people you serve?
- How do you handle winter?
- You are the experts: please teach us!
- Your experience and research can help others