

Don't give the health dangers of cold weather the cold shoulder — especially if you have a heart condition. The American Heart Association offers these hints to help you cope this winter season:

- ☐ High winds, rain and snow can steal body heat. Wind removes the layer of heated air from around the body. At 30°F in a 30-mph wind, the cooling effect is equal to 15°F. Dampness, too, causes the body to lose heat faster.
  
- ☐ To keep warm, wear layers of clothing to trap the heat. Also, wear a hat or head scarf. Heat can be lost through your head. Ears are especially prone to frostbite. Keep your hands and feet warm, too, as they tend to lose heat rapidly.
  
- ☐ Don't drink alcohol. Alcohol gives an initial feeling of warmth, because blood vessels in the skin expand, but that actually draws heat away from vital organs.
  
- ☐ Take precautions to avoid flu and pneumonia. They pose even greater dangers for people who have a heart condition than for healthy people.

Pneumonia is a lung infection that keeps your body from using oxygen as efficiently as it should. Your heart has to work harder to pump oxygenated blood through the body. Your doctor may suggest you get a yearly influenza vaccine and a one-time pneumococcal vaccine.

- □ As much as possible, avoid anyone with a cold or the flu.
  
- □ Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently, especially after using the bathroom and before eating.
  
- □ Keep your hands away from your face.
  
- □ Always read the labels on all over-the-counter (OTC) medications, especially if you have blood pressure of 120/80 mm Hg or higher. Look for warnings to those with high blood pressure and to those who take blood-pressure medications. Consult your doctor before taking any over-the-counter medications or supplements.

- □ Be aware that the use of decongestants may raise blood pressure or interfere with the effectiveness of some prescribed blood pressure medications.

- □ Check the sodium content of any OTCs. Some are high in sodium, which can raise blood pressure. People with high blood pressure should have under 1,500 mg of sodium a day from all sources.

Learn more online at [www.heart.org/coldweather](http://www.heart.org/coldweather) and [www.heart.org/hbp](http://www.heart.org/hbp).