



# WINTER TOP TIPS

FOR AMPUTEES AND  
INDIVIDUALS WITH  
LIMB DIFFERENCE



# Winter Top Tips



Soon the weather will be changing, and winter will be here, so now is the time to start planning and getting ready for the colder weather. When the autumn leaves start to fall things get very slippery under foot and snow can be a real hazard for amputees and people with limb difference. For some amputees and people with limb difference rain is also problematic. More slips and falls occur in the Autumn and Winter months, so it makes sense to try and plan ahead – something us amputees and people with limb difference are very good at!

Also, if money is tight and you are on a budget this is the time to start saving for some good winter gear and maybe stock up your cupboards just in case you can't get out to the shops due to bad weather.



## Leaves

Wet leaves can be hazardous for prosthetic wearers and wheelchair users. Wet leaves create slippery dangerous surfaces that increase your risk of falling, they clutter stairs, entry ways, slopes and pavements. Leaves can also cover other hazards on the ground beneath them such as pavement cracks, potholes, loose cobblestones and loose gravel.

**Go slower than usual and approach slippery surfaces with caution.**

Don't forget to clean the mud and leaves from your shoes when you head indoors, especially if you are walking on polished or hard surfaces. Use floor mats to remove leaves and mud from your boots and make sure to clean around the tread. In your own house it is worth investing in a fixed boot brush, this stays in position and encourages visitors to clean their shoes when they come in, these are available from most garden centres and catalogue stores. (Usually 10-20 pounds)



## Snow and slush

Learn and identify the different types of snow and how it can affect your walking gait and watch out for hidden ice. No matter the type of snow be cautious and put weight through your prosthetic limb before lifting the opposite foot as snow is liable to give way. Keep a good firm base beneath you for balance.



- **Tightly, packed snow;** Be cautious and distribute your weight evenly between heel and toe and keep a good firm base beneath you for balance.

- **Deep snow:** Lift your legs for each step when in deep snow to avoid a fall that could result from dragging your limb through the drifts.

- **Sludge:** When the snow melts surfaces become slippery and there is more risk of hidden ice. Slow your walking speed and take smaller steps, this makes it easier to put weight through the centre of your foot giving maximum stability.

After walking in snow, knock any remaining snow off your boots before you step onto gritted or icy ground. If you can find one hold onto a hand rail and stamp your feet and bang your heels against the ground or against a wall to dislodge the snow from your boot. Clear the snow from the grooves. If you take a backpack with you it is worth packing a back-scrubbing brush, a useful tool to reach the bottom of your shoe without removing your leg.

Don't forget to take care when heading indoors when it has been snowing. The soles of your shoes will still be icy or wet and slipping is still a risk, especially if you are stepping onto hard flooring. Use floor mats to remove the snow or moisture from your boots.

## Ice and Black Ice

Avoid Ice that you can see, even if you have to walk a little further to get around it. If you have to walk over large patches of ice, use a walking aid (e.g. cleats, see below). Walk like a penguin to make your way over the ice, that means small steps and make sure your whole weight is through the front leg before you lift the back leg.

Black ice is a massive hazard because it is not visible, but you can prepare yourself for its possible presence. If there has been rain and the temperature has stayed below zero

throughout and if the pavement looks dry but there are glossy bits it is likely that there will be black ice. Treat black ice like ice, be cautious and move slowly, penguin walk and if possible, use cleats.

Be cautious – Don't trust paths that have been treated with salt, still be careful as there may still be snow and ice on the surface. It is also worth noting that walking on grit, salt or sand can cause your prosthetic foot to lose traction and result in a stumble or fall. If you can, use railings or an assertive aid to help with stability.

## Footwear

Choosing the correct footwear to wear with your prosthesis can be tricky for amputees and people with limb difference (different heel heights can change the foot alignments). Most amputees and people with limb difference prefer to wear flat comfortable shoes.



Now is the time to start looking at a decent pair of walking boots or shoes. Try to buy shoes which have a deep tread for better traction. Running shoes and trainers can be more dangerous than you may think as they are designed to allow you to project your bodyweight forward at speed. If in doubt about new footwear arrange a visit to your clinic to get the limb alignment checked with the new shoes. Smooth soles should be avoided in winter conditions.

Try to make sure your boots or shoes are waterproof and insulated. If they are not waterproof you can buy waterproofing spray and apply it yourself, most need time to cure so it is better to treat them when they are new. Few sprays or shoes are completely waterproof, so top up spraying sessions are recommended and regularly check the prosthetic foot to ensure it is dry and the shoe gets a chance to dry properly before the next wear.

You can also buy waterproofing spray for your outerwear – winter coats, jackets and walking trousers or salopettes. Make sure you treat your clothing in a well-ventilated area or ideally outside.

## Things to think about

- Hydration and health are important, so make sure you eat well and keep hydrated throughout the cold season.



- Consider a buddy system and check up on each other through text message or telephone calls and always let someone know where you are going and what time you are expected back. Stay visible with bright clothing and stay warm and dry. When out carry extra supplies with you and keep hydrated.



- Make sure to stock up on prescription medicine and have an emergency stash for bad weather. The same is true for food and drink, stock food cupboard, if you decide to stay in for a few days.



- It is advisable to take a charged mobile phone out with you – with easily accessible stored numbers for emergency calls.



- When going outside make sure you have suitable clothing for the weather.
- If your prosthesis does become fully wet/immersed, it is always good to advise your prosthetist so that the limb can be stripped and checked for corrosion.

# Winter Top Tips

## Ice cleats/crampons

Use grips or cleats on your shoes. These are fantastic when there is ice and snow under foot.

If you struggle to stretch down to your foot, then you can attach them to the shoe or leg before you put the shoe or leg on. These can be bought in a size which is just for the toe area, it is advisable to get a full shoe version unless you find this too disruptive to your walking.

There are a couple of different types:

**Snow cleats:** these are like snow chains for your shoes/boots, these do take a bit longer to put on and are fantastic if you like to go for a country walk/hike, the only downside to them is they aren't great on normal pavements.

**Ice cleats:** these are really easy to take off and on, as they are normally made from rubber with spikes or at the heel and toe to stop you slipping. These are really good for use on pavements and taking your dog for



a walk in your local park. You can find these quite cheap in most shops Home Bargains, B&M, Asda, Aldi etc. £2-£10) <https://yaktrax.implus.com/> or <https://www.icegripper.co.uk/> and on eBay.

### Useful Tip

If you do get caught out without the correct footwear or forget your ice cleats there is always the old Douglas Bader Trick – put a pair of socks over your shoes, this will give you more traction and reduce the risk of slipping. Be careful though as socks can freeze and soak up the snow, making lifting your feet a challenge and causing their own hazard, so only use this in an emergency.

### Useful Tip

Keep a spare pair of walking boots or trainers in your car or office.

Make sure you get ones that will not angle your foot and affect your alignment. If you are struggling to identify the correct one, ask your prosthetist or physiotherapist and try using them before you are stuck in a pile of snow.

## Things to think about – Ice and Black Ice

- Energy storing feet are great, however when you step off your foot, the foot can slide from under you in slippery conditions if your shoes do not have good grips.
- If you have steps at home – keep them clear and free of leaves and snow to reduce the risk of slipping. Ask a family member/neighbour to clear off your steps and treat them with rock salt, the same applies to driveways and pathways. You can purchase bags of rock salt from B&Q, Homebase etc. Try keeping a broom by your outside door for emergencies.
- Wheelchair ramps or sloped paths are also dangerous, so take extra care on these and use handrails to help you balance. Some people negotiate ramps sideways (crabbing) in icy conditions. This way it is easier to control and hold a leg if it slides. Take it slowly and use small steps and if it helps use a crutch/walking stick/hiking pole as extra support. If you use this technique make sure your strongest leg, is leading the way.
- Use some additional support, this can be a person/s to walk with you and help you balance or an assistive aid such as ice cleats and crampons (Do not use ice cleats or crampons indoors as they can cause you to slip on polished surfaces), walking stick, crutches, walking poles, a walker or a wheelchair, if you struggle to walk. *"I personally use walking poles, with the ice tips as I find that my crutches can slide away from under me on the ice or other slippery surfaces."* You can also buy ice tips for walking sticks and crutches. Whatever you choose practise walking in these on a safe surface before you try walking on ice for the first time.
- You may have total confidence in your prosthesis and your own abilities in spring, summer, and autumn, but come winter, suddenly everything changes. So, it can't hurt to use some additional support. Realise that winter is a slippery time for everybody (physiotherapists spend winter treating all sorts of people who had injured themselves from falls not just amputees) and reach out to the community to know that you are not alone in your experiences.

## Walking Aids: Walking sticks, crutches and walkers

Now is the time to check the wear on your ferrules, those rubber feet on the end of your crutches and walking sticks. Are they worn on one side? Is the grip tread worn away? If so then it is time to order some new ones (ask your physiotherapist/G.P. If they can order you some new ones (the basic grey 3 ring tread ferrules that come as standard). Or there are some different types that suit the winter weather better and last a lot longer than the standard ferrules: These can be purchased privately as they are not available through the NHS.

### Hurricane/tornado tips:

<https://fetterman-crutches.com/collections/tips> Great for walking on wet slippery floors as the ferrule is flexible to maintain a better contact with the floor. Due to the flexible tip these are great on rough terrain too. Not available from the NHS.

### Flexyfoot:

<https://www.flexyfoot.com>

These come with different settings – you can add the washers to stop them being so springy. These are great on all terrains as the ferrule is flexible, so it can hit the floor at any angle, these also have ice caps that simply click on when you need them. The standard flexyfoot foot has really great grip on wet slippery floors as well as mossy rough terrain. These ferrules come in different sizes to fit all walking sticks and crutches.

### HurryCane:

<https://www.hurrycane.co.uk>

It is a great mixed terrain walking stick with more points of contact to help maintain stability.

Some amputees and individuals with limb difference prefer to use Nordic walking/hiking poles instead of walking sticks as they are less likely to slip from under you. They come with different tips that suits the terrain: rubber tip, ice picks, or snow tips etc.



## Winter clothing: Layers are your best friend!

When the temperature drops remember to wear layers of clothing to keep warm. There are some excellent and reasonably priced base layer options from high street stores and outdoor specialists.

Your extremities are the first places that get frost bite so keep your residual limb warm.

Have a look for: (people who makes stump warmers – <http://cpwarmers.com/product-description>). Wearing fleece lined leggings/socks under your jeans/trousers/skirts are a great way to stay warm.

It is not uncommon for people to try and acclimatise to the cold, but low temperatures can be hazardous for vulnerable people. If you have a heart or circulatory condition, it is important to stay warm even when you feel you can tolerate the cold. Changes in the body can make you less aware of the cold.

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/mind-body/preparing-for-winter/>

## Tips for trips or falls:

If you are worried about falling there are a lot of NHS and private centres which give fall prevention and recovery training. Additional balance training is very effective in helping limit the number of stumbles which turn into trips or falls. Regular

exercise can prevent falls. Exercise shows that Tai Chi is beneficial in fall prevention in older adults.

If you do fall – try to pull your arms in and try to roll as you land, this will help save you a trip to A&E with fractured wrists, arms and hips.

Make sure you know how to get up if you do fall and there is nothing available to help yourself up with.

NB: If you are hurt or require medical assistance it may be better to stay on the ground:

- Most importantly, cold as it is, take minute to breath and calm down. The most common reason for struggling to come upright is panic.
- Check your limb is still aligned so it will support your weight.
- If you are on your back roll over onto your front.
- If there is a solid structure to help yourself up with, use it.
- If you are on the floor, place both hands down and use your sound limb to push away from the ground, bring your prosthetic limb under your weight as soon as possible.
- If you are a double amputee balance on your knees and raise yourself to a standing position.
- You can use a crutch, walking stick, hiking pole to help push you back up.
- Give yourself a minute when you've got back up as you may get some nervous shakes from the adrenaline of falling.

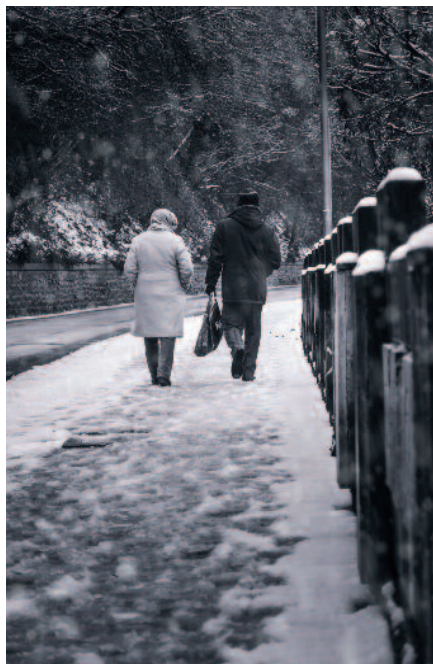
## Winter wheelchair tips:

Have a buddy system and check up on each other through text message or telephone calls and always let someone know where you are going and what time you are expected back. Stay visible with bright clothing and stay warm and dry. Carry extra supplies with you and keep hydrated.





# Winter Top Tips



Make sure you have easy access to the contact details for your Motability service or wheelchair breakdown service, many of these will come out to where you are. This will often take a while and you will be expected to keep safe and warm while you wait, so always pack an emergency blanket – they take up little space and can be used in a variety of ways.

If you need to go out take precautions. Give your wheelchair a health check. Check your frame for potential weaknesses due to wear and tear, tighten nuts and bolts and make sure your battery (if electric) and tires are in good shape. Check your manual for warning about how your battery will react to extreme temperatures. If you use an electric wheelchair, store a backup battery at your home and check its charge level regularly.

Consider getting snow tires, Wheel blades, or anti-tippers for your chair. They can add an extra layer of security while wheeling through snow and ice.

Pack a waterproof tote or backpack with a blanket, hat, gloves, scarf and a spare pair of socks.



## Other useful things to remember

**Take spare prosthetic (stump) socks with you.** In cooler weather conditions our residual limb may lose volume compared to summer, so you may need to carry more socks, if you are running low make sure to speak to your prosthetist.

**Clean your prosthesis** – If you do get your prosthetic foot wet/muddy, just make sure to rinse it well with clean tap water when you get home, making sure to dry all of the components thoroughly afterwards. If you're concerned make sure to book in see to your prosthetist, who can then advise you and check your prosthetic.

**Dry your prosthesis** – Most prosthetic components are NOT waterproof so make sure keep them as dry as possible to stop them rusting.

**Plastic bags** – if you have problems pulling jeans, trousers and leggings over your prosthetic foot and socket – then a plastic bag over the foot can make pulling trousers/jeans/leggings on so much easier. Putting a plastic bag over your foot shell makes putting winter boots, ski boots, wellies so much easier to do and if you are going out walking the dog leaving the foot shell wrapped in a plastic bag helps stop the foot shell getting wet and muddy.

**Cling film** – Wrapping cling film around foot shell and also around socket can stop your jeans/trousers/leggings from riding up all the time. Make sure to use cling film or a plastic bag secured with gaffa tape over your prosthetic, if you're going out for a walk and may end up walking in a deep puddle.

Hand warmers are an excellent way to keep your hands warm for pushing and warm insulated gloves of course.

Keep a can of de-icer in your vehicle to thaw out your chair's axels when they freeze! There's is nothing worse than being cold and wet and trying to get your wheelchair in the car when the normally easy quick release won't release. Spray both the wheel axle and the chair with de-icer and the wheels are easier to remove or put on.

**\*Warning: Wheelchair users beware!** When the councils start putting down rock salt on the roads make sure to start wearing waterproof gloves preferably with

rubber in them. The chemicals in the rock salt treatment they use on the roads and pavements burns the skin, so make sure you don't touch your face or body with your gloves on as you may well get an angry itchy rash on your skin.

If you do get the rock salt treatment on your skin, thoroughly wash it off with soap and plenty of water.

## Useful Tip

Rubber gardening gloves are great wheelchair gloves as they grip the wheel rims easily and stop the rock salt getting on your hands, plus they are quite cheap to buy so its ok if you wear them out.



## Winter Car preparation:

Take your car for a service and make sure to check the battery. Top up engine coolant and washer fluid with antifreeze. Check the condition of your tyres and if you can afford it change to winter tyres and carry a winter car break down kit. Use the acronym FORCES for your DIY winter checks.

FUEL  
OIL  
RUBBER  
COOLANT  
ELECTRICS  
SCREEN WASH

“ F O R C E S ”

Keep spare warm clothing in the boot, as well as a torch and a few basic tools, consider keeping bottles of water in the car as well as emergency food supplies, such as energy bars and chocolate. For longer journeys consider packing waterproofs, sturdy footwear, a shovel, a warm drink in a flask, a fully charged mobile phone, an emergency blanket. Cat litter is a great gritter in a pinch and if you do get stuck in a long jam a blanket can make all the difference to keep you warm.

Remember that even if you are going somewhere that means you don't plan on being outside for very long, anything can happen and you might get stuck in the cold without layers if you have nothing to keep you warm in the car.

**Do make sure your breakdown cover is up to date.**

Some extra bits and pieces to think about include:

**Snow socks** – These are really easy to fit on the wheels and are great for emergencies. You can find these via the AA, RAC, Greenflag websites as well other online stores. All you will need is the size of the wheels for your car – you can find these on the sidewall of the tyres. Approx. £20-40

**Snow chains** – Thankfully these have had a redesign to make them really easy to fit. Once again you will need to know the size of your wheels for your car. These should only be used as directed in the instructions included in the packaging. They should only be used when there is snow on the road surface as using these on clear road surfaces will churn up the tarmac and breakdown the surface leading to potholes.

**Screen Wash** – Make sure you keep the screen wash topped up throughout the winter. Follow the information in your car's handbook.



**There are some great guides for preparing your car for winter and keeping essentials in the car in case of an emergency, here are some links:**

### From the AA:

<https://www.theaa.com/driving-advice/seasonal/winter-checklist>

Active Times:

<https://www.theactivetimes.com/ultimate-car-kit-winter-survival>

### RAC:

<https://www.rac.co.uk/drive/advice/winter-driving/Winter-breakdown-kit-checklist>

### AutoExpress:

<https://www.autoexpress.co.uk/car-news/winter-special/89243/winter-car-checklist-preparing-your-car-for-winter>

Emergency planning for amputees from the Amputee coalition's website:

<https://www.amputee-coalition.org/resources/when-disaster-strikes/>

**If you require medical advice please contact your limb centre or G.P. Any advice you take from this information Sheet, you do so at your own risk.**

## Editorial

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