



@the window

views on organizational health + safety + wellness

Winter 2008

volume 2 number 4

A Heads Up for

Healthier Brains

Photo credit: Nova Scotia Tourism, Culture and Heritage



ANYONE WHO HAS WATCHED A PARENT OR GRANDPARENT descend into the throes of Alzheimer’s disease knows the heartache of losing a loved one while they’re still living, and worries that they may be next.

While the exact causes of Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia are still not known, the good news is that they can be prevented. And prevention is as easy as doing regular physical and mental exercise.

“For a long time we have thought of the brain in old age as an innocent bystander. It sometimes gets bruised and sometimes beaten up, but it’s not as though it can do a lot about it,” writes Kenneth Rockwood, MD, Division of Geriatric Medicine, Dalhousie University. “But,” he says today, “that ain’t necessarily so.”

“Aging is not just a one-way ticket to dementia,” continues Dr. Rockwood. “In 2001, our group published the first paper to say that it looked like exercise could protect against Alzheimer’s disease.”

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Editorial Board

If you have any ideas, or comments for future issues of @the window or would like to contribute an article, please contact a member of the editorial board.

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HEALTHYWORKPLACE



Public Service Commission

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Subsequent studies continue to support the findings.

Dr. Rockwood and his team are not the only ones studying and observing this result. "There are many lines of studies that point to the fact that exercise can help prevent dementia," he says, adding that the amount of exercise required is not much: just a half-hour of brisk walking, three days a week, is enough. "It's got to be more vigorous than just a walk," he stresses.

It's important to note that Dr. Rockwood is talking about prevention. "I can tell a person who is 35 that their risk for Alzheimer's is virtually zero,"

he says. Exercise has the biggest impact when the person is still cognitively intact. That's why it's important to start exercising now.

Dr. Gene Cohen, MD, Ph.D., Center of Aging, Health and Humanities, George Washington University, is another researcher discovering that deteriorating brain function is not an inevitable part of aging. His studies show that brain cells are like muscle cells; mental exercise makes them grow stronger.

So how can we mentally exercise our brains? Menna Maclsaac, Executive Director of the Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia, has a long list of suggestions. Play chess, do crossword and number puzzles. Learn to play a musical instrument. Take a different route to the store. Try dialing

Checklist for Brain Health To Do's

Exercise 3 times a week, play chess, do crossword or number puzzles, learn to play a musical instrument, take a different route to the store, go to a play, learn to play bridge, read a book, socialize.

the phone or writing your name with your opposite hand. Count out your coin change using your sense of touch. Go to a play or learn to play bridge.

Along with taking steps to prevent dementia, we should also be protecting our brain from injury. According to Duff Montgomerie, Deputy Minister of Health Promotion and Protection, that means protecting our entire bodies.

"Wearing your seatbelt, avoiding tobacco and other addictive substances, being responsible about alcohol intake, eating right, and, of course, wearing a helmet when necessary and proper safety equipment at work—almost

everything we do is part of brain health when you think about it."

It all sounds easy, right? It is. And the need to take these easy actions has never been greater. "There are over 14,000 Nova Scotians over the age of 65 with dementia" says Ms. Maclsaac. "Within the next 24 years, with our aging population, this number will double."

January is Alzheimer Awareness Month, and the Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia www.alzheimer.ns.ca is asking us to make our own Brain Healthy Commitment and to learn more about Alzheimer Awareness Month. Premier Rodney MacDonald is leading by example. He's committed to fit a run in at least once a week. You've already seen how easy it is to do. Let's put our brains together to make 2008 a brain-healthy New Year.



We'd like to know what you think of our Provincial Public Service Week initiatives. Take our 5 minute survey at:

<http://www.gov.ns.ca/psc/ppswsurvey>

Thriving Workplaces

WHILE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION has been working on an internal strategy for provincial government employees, the Comprehensive Workplace Health Strategy for Nova Scotia is focused externally and designed to create thriving workplaces that are healthy, safe and productive. The strategy, along with a website including healthy workplace resources (www.thrivingworkplaces.ns.ca), was launched on October 24, 2007.

The strategy was created after the success of HealthWorks, a pilot project developed by the Halifax Business Chamber of Commerce and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia. HealthWorks assisted several Nova Scotia businesses as they introduced health and wellness programs in their workplaces. After seeing great results from the program, representatives from government and the private, public and non-profit sectors were inspired to create a strategy for workplace health across the province.

Comprehensive Workplace Health (CWH) is an approach to protecting and enhancing the health of employees. It

relies on the efforts of employers to create a supportive culture, and then builds on the initiative of its employees to take the lead in their own well-being.

CWH is not a particular program. It is a philosophy, theory, and practice of health promotion that is intended and designed to be incorporated into the strategic business plans of organizations whose governors, owners, and managers care about the well-being of their employees.

Launching the strategy is just the beginning. A public-private senior leadership team to lead the implementation of the strategy is being established. The first task of this group will be to explore public-private operational models to ensure sufficient supports, including financial resources, are developed to support the implementation of the strategy.

KELLY EVANS, HEALTH PROMOTION AND PROTECTION, CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION

Create a Healthy Workplace Contest

CONGRATULATIONS ARE IN ORDER—there were more than 100 entries for the Create a Healthy Workplace Contest. Entry forms were circulated with our 2007/2008 Healthy Workplace Calendar for all government employees. We thank everyone for their contest entries—all the ideas were wonderful and inspiring.

The contest was a great method for getting employees to start thinking about innovative and creative ways to make their workplaces healthier. Entries were analyzed based on three main criteria: health impact, cost efficiency, and creativity. Our judging panel, composed of members of the Healthy Workplace Advisory Committee, selected the following winners:



- 1st Prize **Patricia Brooks**,
Service NS and Municipal Relations
- 2nd Prize **Melanie Leper**,
Health Promotion and Protection
- 3rd Prize **Karen Darling**, Community Services

And our Admirable Idea Winners were,

- 1 **Thom Shields**, Service NS and Municipal Relations
- 2 **Lindsey White**, Health
- 3 **Judith Milne**, Economic Development
- 4 **Paulie Gird**, Natural Resources
- 5 **Chris Trotter**, Justice
- 6 **Ruth Delaney**, Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal

For more details about our winners and their great ideas, visit the healthy workplace website, www.gov.ns.ca/psc/healthyworkplace. We hope that everyone will continue to encourage and support initiatives like these in order to contribute to a healthy, safe, and supportive workplace.

RIMA THOMEH, PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION, HEALTHY WORKPLACE

Healthy Eating in the Workplace

“WHAT DO YOU GET when you combine a passion for healthy eating, a kitchen party and Nutrition Month®? It’s a recipe for successfully launching the new Healthy Eating in the Workplace Guide!”

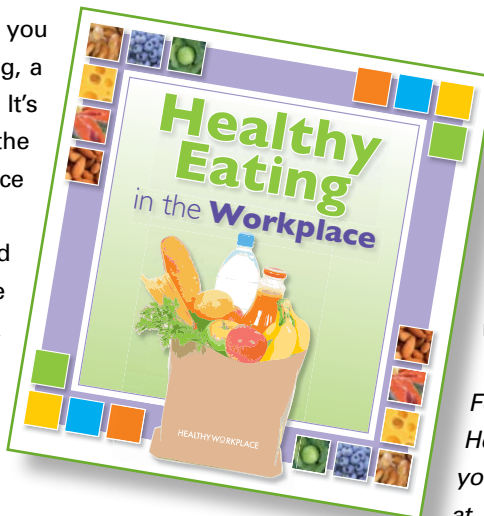
Good nutrition is critical to good health and wellbeing. But it can be hard to eat well during busy work days. That’s why the Public Service Commission has developed a Healthy Eating in the Workplace Guide, due out in March for Nutrition Month®.

The new Guide is intended to be a “how to” resource to help members of healthy workplace committees, health professionals, occupational health practitioners, managers and others who are interested in promoting and making healthy eating a part of their workplace. There is no longer a need to search endless websites for current nutrition information and training will be provided for those who want to implement the Guide.

Research shows that workplace nutrition programs can play an integral role in fostering and supporting employee health. The workplace is a great place to promote healthy eating because adults spend over half of their waking hours at work and typically eat at least one meal and snacks there. Knowledge and skills learned at work can positively influence the eating habits of family and friends as well.

“This Guide is one more resource to support the Nova Scotia Government’s Healthy Workplace policy” said Joan Parks-Hubley, Coordinator of Healthy Workplace at the Public Service Commission. “We want to create work environments that are supportive of healthy eating. There are many things that can be done to make it easier for employees who are trying to eat well and maintain healthy weights.”

The Guide was piloted this fall in five locations, including Economic Development, the Waterville Youth Centre and the Public Service Commission. With sections on education and awareness raising, skill building, supportive environments and policy, it was found to be comprehensive, up to date and useful. It contains power point presentations and colourful table tents using photographs of local food by government photographer, Sheila Ferguson.



On March 26, the Guide will be launched, appropriately at a Nova Scotian Kitchen Party.

Registered dietitian, professional cook and cookbook author Mary Sue Waisman (<http://marysuewaisman.com>) will be on hand to provide a cooking demonstration, as well as makeovers of your favourite recipes.

For more information about the Healthy Eating in the Workplace Guide, you may contact Marriam Nauman at 424-7238 or email [naumanm@gov.](mailto:naumanm@gov.ns.ca)

ns.ca. Or visit the Healthy Workplace website at www.gov.ns.ca/psc/healthyworkplace

Happy Healthy Eating in the Workplace!

MARRIAM NAUMAN, PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION, HEALTHY WORKPLACE

Unique Course Supports a Broad Range of Family Caregivers

“I informed my children’s adoption worker about how beneficial I felt this course was for me, a government employee working full-time and raising 2 special needs children....I learned a great deal from the Family Caregiving course, and valued the opportunity to speak with others in a very supportive environment.”

Dee Ryan-Meister, Communications Nova Scotia

The course is for anyone who is giving care no matter who requires that care.

Next Courses:

Truro – January 16-17, 2008 (filled)

Truro- February 18-19, 2008

Halifax – April 2-3, 2008

Register for **Family Caregiving & the Workplace**

by visiting the PSC section of LearnNet at

<https://learnnet.gov.ns.ca>.

Or to set up a course in your area you may contact Carrie Forbes at 424-2968.

Roadmap to Success



FOR SEVERAL YEARS, Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal hosted wellness clinics across the province that provided health risk assessments on a voluntary basis. Employees who attended the clinics would have the opportunity to have their cholesterol, blood pressure, body mass index and glucose checked by the VON. While the screening was being completed by pre-arranged appointments, employees would attend various health education sessions. From the health risk assessments, some participants were identified to have health risks that needed immediate attention, while others were given information or referral slips to see their own family physician. The group data from the clinics provided Occupational Health and Safety with trends that informed follow-up educational sessions.

As an extension to the wellness clinics and health risk assessments, the Yarmouth area of TIR decided to ask for participants who would like to enhance this program on a more regular basis. The success of the program was mainly dependent on the dedication and motivation of its participants. The first six-month program was launched in June 2006 with a group of 38 participants. Various supports were put in place to help break down some of the barriers that may prevent employees from leading a healthy lifestyle.

The employees who participated were from the Yarmouth, Shelburne and Saulnierville areas. The average age of the group was 45 with both male and female employees participating. When the program was launched, all participants in the program gathered to discuss group and individual goals for the six months.

Large group and small group discussions provided consensus on program elements and various educational

sessions that would be of interest to participants. Employees were introduced to a dietitian who provided both group and individual support throughout the program. Group and private sessions were held with the dietitian on a bi-weekly basis. Health risk assessments were conducted at the three-month and six-month intervals to assess if these supports were effective with regard to individual lifestyle practices. Other resources included various community organizations that covered various health education topics requested by participants.

During the six-month program, one of the group meetings identified major positive results that enhanced the participants' family activities.

It was agreed by the employees that were involved, that a video reflecting their experience could be an excellent tool to increase awareness across the province in healthy lifestyle practices. The video was successfully completed and had its premiere at a theatre in Yarmouth with all employee participants and their families present.

Employees were served healthy snacks and had a great time viewing the end result of a wonderful experience. Individual stories are shared in the video which really identifies how a change in lifestyle practice can impact on your family life. One employee shares how his son's pride in his involvement in the program changed the way he felt about putting his own health first. Everyone shares how different they feel now since beginning the road to "feeling better" both physically and mentally. The video is being used in the launch of TIR's Healthy Workplace Initiative across the province with lots of positive feedback. Employees from across the province

Turning Wishes into Plans

"It takes as much energy to wish as it does to plan." Eleanor Roosevelt

WORKPLACE COMMITTEES like JOHS, healthy workplace, diversity and recognition often wish to improve some aspect of the organization—to make it a safer, healthier, more inclusive and respectful place for everyone.

But without setting goals and developing plans, committees might just continue to discuss problems and long for change year after year. It's easy to get bogged down and stuck in the weeds. It's important for committees to ask themselves, "What can we do today?"

Action planning can help committees chart direction for future programs. At the Department of Justice, the Healthy Workplace Committee in head office set aside time to review all the information on employee needs and interests, as well as some issues raised in employee surveys and their Wellness Leadership Summit.

"It was a little overwhelming at first," said Deb Barbour, the committee chair. "We started with a long list of about 30 action items, but after we established a set of criteria to help prioritize—like whether a large number of employees could benefit, the cost effectiveness, and whether it's 'doable' and would encompass all employees and divisions—and rated each item, we narrowed it down to eight priorities. Then we mapped out the details to ensure they would be accomplished."

An action plan would typically contain a goal, objectives, activities, resources required (people, time and dollars), timelines and responsibilities (who will do what). A strong action plan also includes how a goal will be monitored and evaluated.

At the Public Service Commission, healthy workplace committee plans are connected to business planning, which is also done in some other departments. "Last year, achieving Level 1 in the National Quality Institute's Progressive Excellence Program was a goal for both the committee and the commission," said Maria Tendencia, co-chair of the PSC's Healthy Workplace Committee. "Maybe this year it will be Level 2."

Committees like the OHS Forum and the JOHS Master Committee also develop annual plans. Valerie Wadman, chair of the OHS Forum, explained, "We meet once a year, usually offsite, to plan the coming year's activities. This year, we spent part of the time looking at our own development needs and one member agreed to act as a champion to ensure learning and development for members stayed as a priority in the coming year."

Stacy Gloster, human resource development consultant at the Department of Health works closely with different types of workplace committees and has facilitated some planning sessions. "Burn out can be an issue," she said. "I try to remind people that the team is there to lead but not to do all the work. It's important to involve others in the implementation of the plans—that way committees engage more people, have lighter workloads and it helps with populating the committee in the future and keeping it fun for everyone involved."

So as we start the New Year, does your committee have any plans?

JOAN PARKS-HUBLEY, PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION, HEALTHY WORKPLACE

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are impressed with the Yarmouth area group's experience toward a healthier lifestyle practice.

In follow-up, Yarmouth area has followed the first six-month program with two other six-month programs. The current session is ongoing and doing very well.

Group data includes the following: attendance has been high to all group sessions throughout the program, individual goals have been accomplished on weight loss, lowering blood pressure, lowering cholesterol and controlling blood glucose values.

Most importantly, all employees have gained knowledge about healthy eating and incorporating exercise into their lifestyles.

As an added bonus, participants from the different areas have said that they feel closer to everyone in the program due to sharing common goals. Now, when the larger group meets, participants from the different bases interact more by sharing their individual stories. Many of the participants talk about the healthy changes that have impacted on their family and how they relate both in the workplace and outside in their own community.

A quote from the Yarmouth area participants says it all, "little steps can lead to big rewards."

MARILYN ROBINSON, TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL, OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Environmental Sensitivity:

It's not "all in your head."



DIANE* WAS JUST AS EXCITED as everyone else about the office renovations and the modern, open space in which they'd soon be working.

As the walls were ripped out, new carpet put down, and a fresh coat of paint applied all over, she began to feel tired. An avid participant in her church's holiday craft markets, she suddenly got blinding headaches as she set up the dried-flower displays and arranged the scented candles. Maybe she was just working too hard, she thought.

Things didn't get better when the new office was ready. In fact, they got worse. After visits to several doctors and many consultations and tests, Diane was diagnosed as being environmentally sensitive. The off-gassing from the carpets, paints, and drywall had exceeded her body's tolerance. Her work environment was making her sick.

But for some reason, no one else in the office was experiencing the same symptoms. Behind her back, a few co-workers started to suggest she was putting it on for attention.

"You can have 100 people working in the same building; one will get ill and the others won't," says Susan Coldwell, Coordinator, Rehabilitation Services at Capital Health's Nova Scotia Environmental Health Centre.

The reason? Genetics can play a part—not everyone is sensitive. Some people burn quickly in the sun, others just get a tan; that's another example of differing levels of sensitivity. Throughout the day, week, and year, people are exposed to different levels, too, depending upon their work and social activities.

Research proves that environmental sensitivity is not "all in someone's head," continues Coldwell: "There is quite a body of evidence that supports the physiology and complexity of this illness, and measures a person's ability to function."

The good news is that there are many ways to help reduce the risk of employees having adverse reactions to chemicals. Employers can provide information on less toxic options for personal use as well as for office cleaning. Posters can help make employees, clients, and visitors aware of the impacts of scented products.

We all "share the air." Through education and understanding we can learn how to be sensitive and accommodating when someone around us has a reaction to chemicals in the workplace.

Be sure to check out the next issue of [@ the window](#) to learn more about how and why workplaces can accommodate chemical sensitivity.

To learn more on this topic, visit these websites:

www.lung.ca/protect-protegez/pollution-pollution/indoor-interieur/scents-parfums_e.php

www.environmentalhealthandsafetyoffice.dal.ca/radiatio_1589.html

www.lesstoxicguide.ca/

* Diane is not a real person

The Winter Blues?

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

WEATHER CAN OFTEN AFFECT OUR MOODS. When the sun is shining, we can feel energized and happy, while a foggy, rainy, dark, cold or stormy day can make us feel sluggish, tired, and sad.

For many people, the shift in moods due to weather or seasonal changes does not affect their ability to cope with daily life. For some people, the changes that occur through the seasonal patterns may leave people vulnerable to a type of depression called "Seasonal Affective Disorder" or SAD which often begins with the shorter days of late autumn and can last until the spring.

"SAD can be a debilitating condition, preventing sufferers from functioning normally. It may affect their personal and professional lives and seriously limit their potential. It is important to learn about the symptoms and to know that there is treatment to help people with SAD live a productive life year-round." Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)

"A mild form of SAD, often referred to as the 'winter blues,' causes discomfort, but is not incapacitating. However, the term 'winter blues' can be misleading; some people have a rarer form of SAD which is summer depression. This condition usually begins in late spring or early summer." (CMHA)

Symptoms of SAD are similar to other medical conditions. It is important to see your family doctor for a proper assessment.

According to CMHA symptoms of SAD may include:

Winter SAD

- change in appetite, in particular a craving for sweet or starchy foods
- weight gain
- decreased energy
- fatigue
- tendency to oversleep
- difficulty concentrating

- irritability
- avoidance of social situations
- feelings of anxiety and despair

Summer SAD

- poor appetite
- weight loss
- trouble sleeping

"Generally, symptoms that recur for at least two consecutive winters or summers, without any other explanation for the changes in mood and behavior, may indicate the presence of SAD." (CMHA)

Some effective treatment options for people with SAD according to CMHA include:

- spending more time outdoors during the day
- being in environments where there is natural light
- having regular physical activity
- eating healthy
- consistent sleep patterns

For people with more severe SAD symptoms, working with a health care professional who can develop a treatment plan which may include light therapy (bright artificial light), counselling, and medication may also be needed.

For more information about SAD contact:

Canadian Mental Health Association

Nova Scotia Division

Phone: (902) 466-6600

Email: cmhans@eastlink.ca

Web: www.novascotia.cmha.ca

For help with SAD:

See your family doctor

Contact your EAP

1-800-777-5888 or 424-7948

WANDA PIERRYNOWSKI, RSW, PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION,
EAP CONSULTANT

Success Stories in Wellness

HI, I AM NANCY CROWELL and this is part of the story of my struggle with weight.

It began when I was in my teens. In high school I was heavy and decided that I should lose some weight. So I did, by skipping meals and not eating. I was always hungry. I figured this was the price to pay for being overweight.

Obviously, I didn't go about it the right way, because when I couldn't stick with it any longer, I began eating again. The weight came back, plus more. My weight went up and down for years and I began to have a fear that if I took off some pounds I would put even more back.

For many years I fought an inner battle. I was not happy, my confidence was eroded, and my health was slowly deteriorating. I would work all day and come home exhausted, eat my supper, watch TV and fall asleep in my chair. I was not living; I was existing. This was not fair to my family or myself.

I knew that other people my age and older were living life and enjoying it while I did not have the energy to do much. As I looked at some of my friends, I could see that they had problems also. Not necessarily the same issues as I had, but these were the same friends who encouraged me to do something for myself. They did not always do so much with words, but more by example.

I saw an ad in the local newspaper for a new business "Simply for Life." It would be holding a seminar in my town all about healthy living. I thought: "well, I'll go and listen to what they have to say, as all of my efforts in the past have failed." You could say I was starving for the right answers.

I was very encouraged by the speaker and made an appointment. One week later I signed up for an incredible journey. I won't lie—the first few weeks were a tremendous challenge as I was still fighting that inner battle. One thing that did keep me going was my rush of energy which I started feeling, all from the changes in my eating and exercising habits. Over the months, the weight slowly started to melt away. People were very encouraging with their praise. It's odd how some people who never took the time to encourage or much less, even speak to me, did so now. I felt like the smaller I got, the more visible I became. Figure that!

In the past, when I would reach a certain weight, I would stop practicing the new eating habits and put back



on the pounds. This time, I made a lifestyle change. I eat healthier and exercise more. It no longer feels like a challenge, I actually miss going for a walk or bike ride when time doesn't allow me to do so. Certain foods that I used to devour with gusto no longer hold the same appeal—actually, some of them are not good at all!

I just wish I had won the battle with myself sooner. I have come to realize that I was my own worst enemy. I made every excuse to not get started. However, nothing was holding me back except me.

Now, as the months have gone by, I have found my way, a new way of life. More active, up and about, and enjoying life. Not exhausted and watching life pass me by. Now, I am in control, I have gained back the confidence to go, to do, and to enjoy.

It took a bit more than a year, but I reached my goal of a 100 lb weight loss in May 2007.

NANCY CROWELL, SERVICE NS AND MUNICIPAL RELATIONS,
PROPERTY REGISTRATION

Being Mindful and Safe this Winter Season






TAKE NOTE EVERYONE: winter is here, which apart from the joys of the holidays, also means freezing winds, snowy weather, and slippery ice. With these conditions in mind, we want all employees to take care while going about their daily tasks at both work and home.


According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, almost 12,000 Ontarians visited an emergency room in 2002-2003 after falling on ice, and over half of those incidents took place during January and February. According to statistics, baby boomers, those aged 40 to 59, are the most prone to falling on ice. They accounted for 30 per cent of the emergency room visits due to falling on ice. In 2006, nearly 90 Nova Scotians were injured in WCB-reported workplace incidents involving snow, ice or other winter conditions.


Just a bad fall on ice can have long-term consequences, ranging from a serious disabling injury to a fear of falling again. This may discourage some people from leading an active lifestyle during the winter months.


The Canada Safety Council offers some practical suggestions to promote safe winter walking:


-  Choose a good pair of winter boots, with low heels, and a thick tread sole.
-  Dress in layers. But do not wear a hat or scarf that blocks your vision or makes it hard to hear traffic.
-  Remember vehicles can be dangerous to walkers as well. Before you step off the curb, make sure


oncoming vehicles have come to a complete stop, and are not sliding towards you.

 Ice grippers on footwear can help you walk on hard packed snow and ice. But be careful! Ice grippers become dangerously slippery on cement, stone, tile and other hard surfaces, especially those first couple of steps as you come in from outdoors.

 Keep entranceways and sidewalks clear of ice and snow. Spread salt or sand as soon as necessary. Know where to find salt or sand in your workplace.

 If you must walk on an icy surface, slow down, think about your next step, stay loose, and take small steps letting your whole foot come down at once. Then shift your weight slowly and bring your other foot to meet it in the same way.

 Some people prefer to shuffle their feet. This is fine, but just remember to place your whole foot on the ice at once and keep your center of gravity over your base of support.

 Of course, it is always better to avoid tricky situations by being prepared and planning a safe route for your walk.

Please be cautious this season—remember we want to hear from you, not about you.