

## **Older Adults Vulnerability in Cold Weather**

Hi, this is Dr. Sonya Hardin in the College of Nursing at East Carolina University. Today I want to talk to you about older adults and their vulnerability in cold weather. There are some ways that we can help our patients stay safe during the winter months. It's important that when we talk to our patients we find out whether or not they have a good heat source within their homes. It's important that we talk with them about cold weather and whether or not they have warm clothes, hat, gloves and coat. We should always recommend that our older adults wear several layers of loose clothing. When it's cool the layers will trap warm air between them. They should not wear tight clothing because this can actually keep blood from flowing freely.

It's important that we look at some of the medicines used by older people, as they can increase the risk of accidental hypothermia. These include drugs used to treat anxiety, depression or nausea, as well as some over-the-counter cold remedies can also cause problems.

When temperature outside has dropped, one should avoid drinking alcohol because alcohol drinks can make one lose body heat. It's also very important to make sure that there's enough food in one's home in order to keep up their weight.

Finally, I'd like to speak just momentarily about the use of space heaters. You may be tempted to tell your patients to warm a room with a space heater. However, some space heaters are fire hazards and others can cause carbon monoxide poisoning. The Consumer Product Safety Commission has information on the use of space heaters. A few things to keep in mind is that they should be approved, they should be using the right size of heater for the space they are heating, the heater should always be put on a flat surface, and children and pets should be kept away from the heating element.

It's important to talk to patients about their heating bills. Many patients may find that they don't have funds to pay their heating bills because during the winter months their heating bills will go up. It's important that we work to get them involved with low income home energy assistant programs. These programs can help people with limited incomes to afford not only heating but also cooling. Your area agency on aging, senior centers or community action agencies may have information on these programs

Thank you for listening to me today. I am Dr. Sonya Hardin in the College of Nursing at East Carolina University.