

DOUGLAS COUNTY **Healthy Directions** **Wellness Newsletter**



Laura Marcell, Phil Rooney and Debbie Peterson lead the way for lunchtime walks.

PHIL'S Winter Walking Challenge!

If you like the idea of walking in a Winter Wonderland, this may not be the group for you. But, if you want to escape from the elements and still improve your health, Phil's Winter Walking Challenge may be just what you're looking to do during these cold months.

Having tried numerous times before, with some success, to improve my fitness, it seemed winter was the obstacle that always popped up about the time things were starting to go well. Never one to enjoy the gym - and I've tried enough of them - I wanted to continue the good start Douglas County's Wellness Program has provided us.

So, taking a lead from some of my Health Department co-workers, I learned their indoor walking course and thought I'd lead a group. Leading the group, I thought, would leave me no choice but to stick with the program.

To date, except for the day of the big blizzard, it has worked. Three times per week, beginning at noon, I have made the 1.25-mile trek through the tunnels of downtown Omaha, joined by anywhere from one to seven people. Other groups depart on the half around round lunchtime, with Laura Marcell from the Register of Deeds office and Debbie Peterson from Human Resources offering to lead groups. More leaders are needed as we hope to build on this early success.

While I don't hope to end up with a six pack, at least a may work off the calories from one or two.

Phil Rooney

What's Inside:

December 2009

- Dietitian Names Top Five Holiday Foods
- What is Domestic Violence?
- Winter Fun at the New UNMC Ice Skating Rink
- January Health and Wellness Screenings at the Civic Center
- And more!

Health Center

WINTER WALKING CHALLENGE!



The Health Center had 46 people sign up for the Winter Walking Challenge. Their goal is to....



WALK TO THE ROCKIES!

Everyone is welcome to join in! Let's see who gets to Estes Park in the beautiful rocky mountains of Colorado first!

The DCHD Wellness Committee is sponsoring the Walk to the Rockies. Tally your minutes walked on the bulletin board outside of Employee Health. Each box represents 20 minutes of walking; your first 100 minutes of walking will get you to Mahoney State Park, color in the boxes as you go and before long you will be in central, then western, Nebraska and finally beautiful Colorado.

Jennifer Beisheim

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

COMMIT TO BE FIT



DIETITIAN NAMES TOP FIVE HOLIDAY FOODS

'Tis the giving season so treat yourself to holiday goodies that are good for you.

“Some of the tastiest treats of the season pack a powerful nutritional wallop,” said Jennifer McDaniel, a registered dietitian and director of undergraduate programs in nutrition and dietetics at Saint Louis University.

“We tend to associate certain foods with the holidays, but they’re so nutritious we should include them in our everyday diet.”

Here are McDaniel’s top five power foods for your holiday munching:

Cranberries: High in vitamin C, cranberries contain more disease-fighting antioxidants than most other berries. Because of their high acidity, they store easily and can keep in your refrigerator for up to two months. Substitute dried cranberries for raisins when you bake, sprinkle them over a salad or throw a handful in trail mix. Add fresh cranberries to your favorite muffin or pancake recipe. Combine fresh cranberries with diced apples, cinnamon, lemon juice, crushed pecans and sugar for a pie or cobbler filling that is the perfect blend of sweet and tart favors.

Cinnamon: About a half a teaspoon of cinnamon a day lowers the blood-sugar levels in patients who have type 2 diabetes and reduces bad cholesterol, some studies show. Cinnamon also may help stop the growth of bacteria. Add this spice to your morning coffee, hot chocolate, hot breakfast cereal or apple cider. Shake some in pancakes, muffins or waffle batter. And sprinkle a dash of cinnamon on yogurt or winter comfort foods, such as stew or chili.

Nuts: Evidence is mounting that nuts help control your weight and decrease your risk of cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Nuts and seeds are a great source of protein, fiber and monounsaturated fats, which are important for heart health. Walnuts provide essential omega-3 fatty acids, which carry numerous health benefits. Add nuts and seeds to homemade trail mix or granola, use them to zip up chicken or tuna salads, combine in baked goods or sprinkle some in your salad for a healthy crunch. Caveat: because nuts are high in calories - one ounce contains about 150 calories - a small serving goes a long way.

Red wine: Appropriately colored for the season, red wine is a particularly rich source of antioxidants. Resveratrol, found in grape skins and seeds, increases HDL cholesterol and prevent blood clotting. Flavonoids also helps prevent blood clots and plaques from forming in arteries. As you celebrate the season, enjoy a glass or two, but remember moderation is the key.

Pomegranates: Credit a couple of antioxidants for giving pomegranate seeds their rich ruby red Christmas color. Pomegranate juice may have two or three times the antioxidant power of green tea or wine. Early research shows that pomegranate juice may help reduce cholesterol and possibly bring down blood pressure. Pomegranates can be a messy food to prepare, so open them over a large bowl of ice water. The pulp floats to the top and the seeds to the bottom. Sprinkle the seeds on salads, into batters or on breakfast cereals. Use the juice in a smoothie or salad dressing.

McDaniel said adding these foods to our eating routine is a way to extend the sparkle of the season long after the Christmas tree has come down.

“These five foods are natural nutrient powerhouses,” McDaniel added. “Finding a way to incorporate those foods into our everyday eating patterns can help us enjoy the holidays year round.”

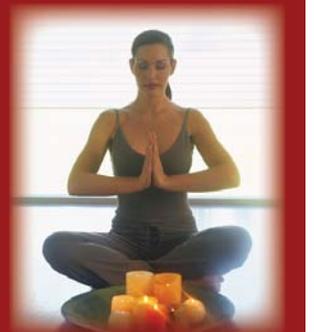
Saint Louis University



Make sure everyone in the family gets home safely this holiday season by buckling their seat belt every trip, day and night.

Stress Reduction For The Holidays

- Exercise and get enough sleep
- Watch your alcohol and caffeine intake, including chocolate
- Schedule fifteen minutes each day for yourself to totally relax
- Try stress-reducing techniques like deep breathing or stretching whenever you begin to get tense



Family Services

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WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence is a systemic pattern of abusive behaviors (psychological, sexual, physical, and/or economic) used by an individual to establish power and control over his/her partner. The abuser is able to maintain power and control through the fear and intimidation of his/her partner.

Prevalence and patterns of domestic violence

- Domestic violence crosses all ethnic, racial, age, national origin, sexual orientation, religious, and socioeconomic lines. Domestic violence can happen to anybody.
- In heterosexual relationships, 95% of all victims are female; and 95% of all perpetrators are male.
- Studies suggest that one-fifth to one-third of all women will be physically assaulted by a partner or ex-partner during their lifetime.
- Domestic violence occurs within same-sex relationships with the same statistical frequency as in heterosexual relationships.
- About 30,000 households in the Omaha Metro area are living with domestic violence.
- Domestic violence may affect a woman's ability to financially support herself and her children
- 22% to 35% of women who visit emergency rooms in the United States are there for symptoms related to ongoing abuse

Important phone numbers

- **YWCA Omaha 345-6555**
- **YWCA 24 Hour Hotline 345-7273**

Law Enforcement

- Emergency 911
- OPD Telephone Reporting Unit 444-4877
- OPD Domestic Violence Unit 444-5825
- Douglas County Sheriff Department investigation line for Domestic Violence 444-7765

Douglas County Courts

- DV Prosecutor 444-3545
- Protection Order office 444-4350
- Protection Order service 599-2600
- Victim Information
Notification 1-877-634-8463 *To determine status of offender custody*

Omaha Police Department

- Victim Assistance 444-4597 *Assistance with criminal justice system*

Shelter and hotline information

- The Shelter 558-5700
- Heartland Family Service 292-5888
- Phoenix House 712-328-0266
- Nebraska Shelter Information 800-876-6238
- Nebraska Spanish-speaking shelter information 877-215-0167
- Legal Aid of Nebraska 348-1060
- National Deaf/Hard of Hearing Hotline TTY-800-787-3224



Do you:

- feel afraid of your partner much of the time?
- avoid certain topics out of fear of angering your partner?
- feel that you can't do anything right for your partner?
- believe that you deserve to be hurt or mistreated?
- wonder if you're the one who is crazy?
- feel emotionally numb or helpless?

Does your partner:

- humiliate or yell at you?
- criticize you and put you down?
- treat you so badly that you're embarrassed for your friends or family to see?
- ignore or put down your opinions or accomplishments?
- blame you for his own abusive behavior?
- see you as property or a sex object, rather than as a person?

Does your partner:

- have a bad and unpredictable temper?
- hurt you, or threaten to hurt or kill you?
- threaten to take your children away or harm them?
- threaten to commit suicide if you leave?
- force you to have sex?
- destroy your belongings?

Does your partner:

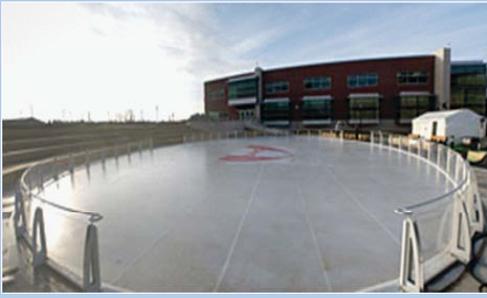
- act excessively jealous and possessive?
- control where you go or what you do?
- keep you from seeing your friends or family?
- limit your access to money, the phone, or the car?
- constantly check up on you?

Economic or financial abuse:

- Rigidly controlling your finances.
- Withholding money or credit cards.
- Making you account for every penny you spend.
- Withholding basic necessities (food, clothes, medications, shelter).
- Restricting you to an allowance.
- Preventing you from working or choosing your own career.
- Sabotaging your job (making you miss work, calling constantly)
- Stealing from you or taking your money.

www.helpguide.org

Need help with problems that affect your personal or professional life? **The Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** is available to all DC wvemployees. It's free to employees and their family members. Records are kept confidential and not included in the staff member's personnel file. Call 593-1711 for an appointment.



WINTER FUN AT NEW UNMC ICE SKATING RINK

The University of Nebraska Medical Center now has an outdoor ice skating rink! The rink was made possible by a gift from Omaha philanthropists Ruth and Bill Scott and is part of UNMC's student plaza near the Sorrell Center.

"The ice rink will provide fun-filled moments for the students, the staff, the children and others to reduce their stress and enjoy life," said UNMC Chancellor Harold M. Maurer, M.D., who came up with the skating rink concept based on his fond memories of the ice rink at Rockefeller Center in his native New York.

"The ice rink and student plaza will keep our batteries charged," said Andrew Klutman, vice president of the UNMC Student Senate. "The students at UNMC could not be more thankful to the Scotts."

SEASON:

Friday, December 4, 2009 through Sunday, February 28, 2010

HOURS:

Monday - Friday, 4:00 - 8:00 pm
Saturday, 10:00 am - 8:00 pm
Sunday, 12:00 noon - 8:00 pm

RINK LOCATION:

Between 42nd and 40th Streets and Dewey and Emile Streets.

FEES:

Cash and credit cards only. No checks or debit cards

ADMISSION:

- UNMC Students (With valid campus photo ID) FREE
- Employees (With Valid Campus Photo ID)
- University of Nebraska Medical Center, University of Nebraska Medical Center-Physicians, The Nebraska Medical Center, Nebraska Pediatrics Practice, Inc. and Their Accompanying Relatives \$4.00
- All Others Adults \$ 6.00
- All Other Children (12 and under) \$ 4.00

* One adult sponsor must accompany every four children under the age of 12.

- Skate Rental: Admission into the ice rink (listed above) plus \$3.00 per pair of skates rented.



JANUARY HEALTH AND WELLNESS SCREENINGS AT THE CIVIC CENTER

January 20, 2010

11:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Room 702 Civic Center

The screenings will consist of:

Body Composition Health Screening that measures an individual's body fat. Results are given immediately along with educational handouts.

Flexibility Health Screening which is a joint's ability to move through a full range of motion. Some of the benefits are improved physical performance, decreased risk of injury, reduced muscle soreness, improved posture, and increased blood and nutrients to tissues.

Grip Strength Health Screening that measures the muscular strength of your upper extremities.

Body Mass Index Health Screening

Blood Pressure Health Screening

Weight Vest - shows the effect of adding 20 additional pounds to your body frame.

Lung Capacity Screening that evaluates how well your lungs work.

Employees can go to each of the booths or any one that they choose.



Weight Watchers at the Health Center

Weight Watchers began November 3rd at the Health Center and will continue every Tuesday at 11:30 in Town Hall. This is open to anyone. Price is \$12.00 per meeting. Weigh-in is at 11:30 the meeting starts at 12:00.



We'd like to hear from you! If you have a question or comment for the Healthy Directions committee, e-mail Kathy Goodman at kathy.goodman@douglascounty-ne.gov, drop her a note to Human Resources, Rm 505, or call her at 444-6099.

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LAUGHTER IS GOOD MEDICINE

In last month's newsletter, we asked our readers to send us the title of their favorite funny movies and books. The titles are in!

Movies:

Monty Python and the Holy Grail
 Blazing Saddles
 Space Balls
 Caddy Shack
 Good Morning Vietnam
 Ghost Busters
 Some Like it Hot
 Arsenic and Old Lace
 Operation Petticoat
 Something about Mary
 Uncle Buck
 Airplane
 Animal House
 Vacation
 Christmas Vacation
 Fast Times at Ridgemont High
 It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World

Cannonball Run
 Smokey and the Bandit
 Son in Law
 The Sand Lot
 Planes, Trains and Automobiles
 Jingle all the Way
 Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey
 Pillow Talk
 What about Bob
 Naked Gun
 The Gods Must Be Crazy
 The Philadelphia Story
 Young Frankenstein
 Bananas
 The Producers (the original version)
 Year One
 I Love You, Man

Overboard
 Captain Ron
 Mr. Deeds
 School of Rock
 Bruce Almighty
 Ferris Bueller's Day Off
 The Jerk
 The Nutty Professor
 Hot Shots
 Happy Gilmore
 The Great Outdoors
 The Blues Brothers



Books:

Anything by George Carlin
 Eats Shoots and Leaves by Lynne Truss
 A Confederacy of Dunces by John Kennedy Toole
 A Walk in the Woods by Bill Bryson



STEPS TO END OVEREATING

You already know the signs of overeating. Your scale moves in the wrong direction. You tell yourself you'll eat only a few potato chips. Then, you polish off the whole bag.

It's easy to take in more calories than your body needs — food is all around and portions are big. What's more difficult is knowing how to stop overeating if it's a habit for you. The good news: There's a recipe for eating sensibly. These tips may help:

Set the stage. "No one should eat without a table, plate and chair," says Dawn Jackson Blatner, R.D., spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. You need all three to focus on your food and actually take a mental snapshot of what you're consuming. This eliminates nibbling out of the fridge and dining on the fly — which can lead you to eat too much.

Downsize portions. Today's bagel is typically twice as big and has more than double the calories as one sold 20 years ago. Likewise, in the past two decades the average soda serving has tripled in size and calories. This supersizing of food is a big reason many of us overeat. To fight portion inflation at home:

Avoid the temptation of extra helpings by never eating food straight from a package. Instead, put single servings in your own container.

Dish up food in the kitchen and put it on plates, rather than

serving food on your table. You're less likely to overeat when food is out of reach.

Try using a smaller plate.

Restaurants often serve more food than one person needs. To scale back, split entrees with someone else. Or, eat half your food and pack the other half to take home. Also, be wary of any food served in a "super" or "deluxe" portion, such as soda or fries. The small or regular size is almost always enough. Consider skipping the appetizer and ordering a salad with a healthful dressing instead.

Skip the multitasking. Any activity you combine with eating — such as watching TV or reading — makes you less aware of how much food you're munching.

Slow down. "It takes 20 minutes for your stomach to send a message to your brain that you're full," says Blatner. Try putting less on your fork, chewing slowly and putting your fork down between bites. This helps give your brain time to catch up with your stomach.

Don't become famished. Overly hungry people tend to overdo it when they finally eat. "So, eat meals every five hours and plan sensible snacks in between, such as celery and peanut butter," Blatner advises. "This may help you bridge the gap between meals."

When it comes to food, your habits can work for or against you. By making the right — and fairly simple — choices, you can help control how much you eat. But, be sure to talk with your doctor if you think you're having difficulty with overeating.

uhc.com

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SPECIAL DECEMBER INSERT



NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO'S CAR TALK WINTER DRIVING TIPS



Car Talk is a radio talk show broadcast weekly on National Public Radio stations throughout the United States and beyond. Its subjects are automobiles and repair, and it often takes humorous turns. The hosts of *Car Talk* are brothers Tom and Ray Magliozzi, also known as *Click and Clack, the Tappet Brothers*. Here are their tips for preparing your car and driving skills for winter.



Car Talk Winter Driving Tips

1. If your car needs regular service, get it done now. Nothing's a big deal in the summer.

You break down? So what? It's a nice night out. Look at all those stars! But break down when it's minus jaw-freezing outside, and that's a different story. Since bad hoses, belts, water pumps and spark plug wires can leave you stranded in the winter, it's better to bite the bullet and fix them. It's better than spending the same amount of money after you've been sitting in your stalled car for three hours waiting for AAA. (Just kidding, Triple A! No one has ever had to wait three hours for one of your tow trucks, have they?)

Here's one service item that's often forgotten: tire pressure. Ask your mechanic to check it, or do it as soon as winter arrives. Why? Because tire pressure drops by about one pound per ten degrees of temperature. So, if it's -10 now, and the last time you checked your tire pressure was back during that sweltering heat wave in July, your tires will be dangerously low and will jeopardize your car's handling.

Many newer vehicles have tire pressure monitors, which alert you to dangerous changes in tire pressure. In fact, as of 2008, tire pressure monitors are required on all new vehicles. But older cars don't have them and the pressure needs to be checked manually.

2. Make sure your battery and charging system are up to snuff.

Your mechanic should check the battery, charging system, and belts. Your battery can leave you stranded simply because it's old and lousy. Or it could leave you stranded because your charging system isn't working well, and the battery isn't getting charged properly. So have your mechanic check the battery and charging system.

If you find that you need a new battery, get the biggest, meanest, ugliest battery that will fit in your car. Two things to remember about batteries: First, the battery that started your car easily in the summer may not have enough oomph to do it in winter. In winter, the engine is harder to start, because the oil isn't as "fluid" as it was last July. And secondly, batteries lose power as the temperature drops (you remember your high school chemistry, right?). So not only do you need MORE power to start the engine in winter, you also get LESS power from the same battery.

Batteries are rated by a measure called "cold cranking amps" (CCA), the maximum number of amps that the battery can deliver at zero degrees (F) for 30 seconds. Good, powerful batteries are rated at or above 600 CCA. We've never really liked this CCA rating because some batteries rated at 600 CCA can just barely make the 30-second criterion, and some can pump it out much longer - clearly better batteries. Along came our pals at Consumer Reports. When they rate batteries, they do the CCA test and report how long the battery puts out the 600 amps. Great, says us. So take a look at their ratings for the lowdown.

3. Check the cooling system.

Make certain the antifreeze will protect your car at the winter temperatures you'll experience in your area. For most areas, you'll need a 50-50 mix of coolant to water. You may think, "I'll be extra good to my car, and give it 100% coolant." Guess what? You're wrong. The 50-50 mix has a lower freezing point. Not only that, but 100% coolant is less able to transfer heat away from your engine, and has been known to cause such nasty things as melted spark plugs or engine failure under the wrong circumstances. So, mix it up!

Protection	Freeze-up Protection	Boilover Protection	Corrosion Protection
Minimum 50% anti-freeze 50% Water	-34°F	+265°F	Exceeds all ASTM and SAE standards for corrosion protection
Maximum 70% anti-freeze 30% Water	-84°F	+276°F	

You can check the freeze rating of your car's coolant yourself with a little device that you can buy in an auto part store for a couple of bucks. With it you suck up a little of the anti-freeze from the radiator - or the overflow container - and see how many of the little balls float. It's cute. If this is beyond you, most real gas stations will do it for you in a couple of minutes. By the way, having good coolant in your engine is very important because if the coolant freezes, it expands, and it's bye-bye engine block. And that means bye-bye to the 50-inch plasma TV you've been saving up for.

But that's still only half the story. The other primary function of antifreeze is to keep your cooling system from rusting. The rust inhibitors in antifreeze break down over time and need to be renewed. So, at a minimum, change your engine's coolant at the interval recommended by your manufacturer. Besides, draining out the coolant and refilling the system also removes dirt and rust particles that can clog up the cooling system and cause problems, regardless of the season.

There are two primary types of coolants available on the market today. The first is traditional, green-colored antifreeze, which can be used in any car. The second is a newer, long-life coolant, which comes in a variety of colors. It should only be used in recent-model cars because it may damage some of the engine gaskets in older cars. If you're not sure whether your car uses the new or old-style antifreeze, check with your manufacturer.

In a pinch, the new and the old coolants can be mixed- but if you do that, you should drain the cooling system next time your car is in for service. The rust-inhibiting additives in the two coolants can actually counteract each other and, over a long period of time, allow the cooling system to rust. It takes a long time for this damage to occur, so you don't have to rush home and drain the system. But do take care of it promptly, so you don't forget and find yourself slapping your credit card down for an engine rebuild, a few years later.

Finally, if you're driving a General Motors car that uses their Dexcool coolant, we'd suggest you pay extra attention to flushing your cooling system on a regular basis. Several years ago, early formulations of Dexcool would form sludge after mixing with air, clogging cast-iron cooling passages and generally wrecking havoc on engines. GM seems to have fixed the problem, but why take a chance? Keep an eye on it.

4. If you have leaks in the cooling system, take care of them now.

While many people think of overheating as a summer problem, cars can overheat in winter, too, if they run low on or out of coolant. And overheating can cause expensive engine damage whenever it happens. Plus, if you have no coolant - or low coolant - you have no heat!

5. Make sure your windshield wipers are in good shape.

Be sure your current wiper blades clean the windshield well, and allow you to see clearly in wet weather. Even when there's no active precipitation, water from melting snow and slush or truck tires is often thrown up onto your windshield. And if you can't see, you can't drive very well.

Winter wipers - with the rubber coverings that keep ice from collecting on the blade - have become very popular. They're great in the winter, but make sure you take them off in the spring. Winter wipers are heavy, and if you use them all summer, you'll wear out the wiper motor prematurely.

And when using your wipers in the winter, remember to turn them off BEFORE shutting off the engine. Why? Water frequently freezes overnight during the winter. And if your blades freeze to the windshield, when you go to start your car, the wiper motor may burn out trying to get them back to the "rest position," while you're sitting there wondering, "What's that burning smell?"

6. Keep your gas tank close to full..In the summer, you can take a chance and run down to fumes.

But in the winter, if you do get stuck or stranded, the engine will be your only source of heat. And you don't want to have to worry about conserving fuel and saving the planet right at that moment...you want to stay warm. You can run the engine indefinitely at idle to stay warm-or as long as you have gas. No harm will be done to the engine.

By the way, if you have an old jalopy, we suggest you crack open the window a bit if you are going to be idling the engine. Old jalopies are more likely to suffer from exhaust leaks and rust holes. This may not be a problem while you're driving because the wind is removing the exhaust as you move forward; but if you're sitting for a long time while carbon monoxide is slowly leaking into the passenger compartment, well, we could lose another listener. And we've only got six left!

Finally, if you are pulled over and stopped in the midst of a humungous snowstorm, be sure to get out periodically and remove snow from behind the tailpipe to keep it unobstructed.

7. Make sure your windshield washer reservoir is full.

On a snowy or messy day, you can easily go through half a gallon or more of windshield washer fluid trying to keep your windshield clear. For that reason, it's also a good idea to keep some extra fluid in the trunk in case you run out. And make sure you get the good stuff - stay away from the already-half-frozen stuff outside your local gas station! Even though it may say "Good to Minus 30," some of these cheap fluids freeze around zero degrees! Even if you buy the good stuff, if you live in a very cold area, you also may need to supplement your windshield washer fluid with some concentrate. The concentrate is available in one-pint bottles and works very well at extremely low temperatures.

8. A lot of folks ask us about carrying sand in the back of the car.

If you have a rear-wheel-drive vehicle that needs help in the snow, you can put a bag or two of sand behind the rear axle. This extra weight will increase the traction of the rear wheels.

So where, exactly, is the rear axle? Draw an imaginary line between the two rear wheels. That's the location of the rear axle, which is usually towards the front of the trunk.

However, you can make things worse by putting too much weight too far back. In essence, by weighing down the rear end too much, you "lift up" the front end and lose some steering and braking abilities. We suggest you start with a 20 pound bag as far back in the car as you can get it. Then, go for a ride and see how your car steers and handles.

Whatever you do, don't put the sand in the passenger compartment. In an accident, the bags can become projectiles. And who wants to be fatally dope-slapped by a 50-pound bag of sand?

On a front-wheel-drive car, don't bother with sandbags. An enormous weight (the engine, that is) is already over the wheels that are powered. Finally, remember: If you don't have sand, you can always substitute a mother-in-law. If you can squeeze her into the trunk, all the better.

9. If you live in western Siberia, northern Minnesota, or some place like that, think about adding a block heater to your engine.

That's a small electric engine heater that plugs in to your home's wiring via a regular, 120 volt AC plug, at night. It's almost required equipment for diesel engines in frigid climates. But it can be used on regular gasoline engines, too. And for less than a hundred dollars, you can be virtually guaranteed that your car will start, even on the coldest, butt-freezes-to-the-driver's-seat mornings. A side benefit of this is that you'll have instant heat in the morning. Actually, that may be the greatest benefit! One note of caution: If you do get a block heater, try to remember not to drive off with your car still plugged into your house.

10. Make sure your rear-window defroster works. In many states, the law requires that ALL of your windows be clear before you hit the road.

Now, you can always use your old Car Talk T-Shirt on the rear windows to wipe off the condensation - as long as you pull over and do it again every ten minutes. But a working rear defroster is a better solution.

11. Know your car.

Every car has different handling characteristics. You should know what your car can and cannot do in the snow. (Hint: It can't do any of the things it was doing on the TV commercial that made you buy it.) You should know if you have front, rear, part-time or full-time four-wheel drive; antilock brakes; traction control; and stability control. You should know what kind of tires are on the car, and how all those things work and how they help you or don't help you. In fact, it's not a bad idea to do a little driving in an empty parking lot on a snowy day just so you know what to expect from your car when you drive on snowy roads.

12. If you really have to drive in the snow.

That is, if you can't call in sick or tell the boss you'll be in later. If you live in an area where it snows a fair amount, you should get four good snow tires. Nothing will make a bigger difference. Because it's such a pain to get your snow tires remounted and balanced every year, splurge and get yourself four steel rims and mount the snows permanently on those rims. That'll make the changeover in the fall and spring a snap. By the way, lots of tire shops will offer to store your regular tires over the winter and then store your snow tires in the summer. This is a great deal. The only potential problem is that when they file a Chapter 11 bankruptcy, they'll have four of your tires in their basement, so you'll have to break in and retrieve them.

If you absolutely can't afford four snow tires, two new snow tires will be better than whatever you have on your car now. Mount them on the wheels that are driven by the engine. For all-wheel-drive cars, you really should use four snows.

One question we get asked frequently is, "If I have a front-wheel-drive or an all-wheel-drive car, do I need to have snow tires?" The answer is, if you really need to drive in the snow, yes. If you really, truly need to get around before the streets are plowed, four top-quality snow tires are the single best thing you can do. And the

reason you'd still want them on a car with decent traction is because they not only help get you started, they also increase your traction when you're braking and turning.

13. Make sure you have some basic supplies in your car in case you do get stuck.

Invest in a substantial snowbrush and an ice scraper. It's good to have a shovel and a bag of sand to help with traction, and the aforementioned extra windshield washer fluid. A blanket is a good idea - just in case. If you have any winter clothes you don't wear anymore, especially an old pair of boots, throw them in the trunk, too. The last item we always carry? Robert A. Caro's biography of Lyndon Johnson. It's 900 pages, so it's sure to keep us occupied until help arrives and beyond.

14. Winter driving emergencies are among the few legitimate uses for a cellular phone.

If you're cellularly inclined, and you promise not to use it to chat while you smash into other innocent people, a cell phone is certainly a plus if you get stuck.

15. If you're in an area that permits or requires tire chains, they should obviously be in the trunk, too.

And be sure you've practiced putting them on before you need them. Trust us - applying tire chains is much harder when you're knee-deep in slush in the dark and other cars are whizzing by you. If chains are too much, you may want to throw one of those ladder-like devices in your trunk. They unfold to provide a steel surface for the tire to grip if you're stuck in snow or ice. These are for sale under several different trade names, one of which is Tiger Paws.

16. Clean off your car-entirely!

Once snow or ice does arrive, take some extra time to make sure your car is clean and your visibility is good.

Clear off the entire car, not just a little peephole in the windshield. You need just as much, if not more, visibility in poor conditions because you have to keep your eyes peeled for pedestrians, and every other knucklehead on the road. Make sure every glass surface is clear and transparent by using a snowbrush and/or ice scraper. Your side-view mirrors, and all all lights should be brushed and cleared as well.

Now, if you haven't been smart enough to do so already, clean the snow off the rest of the car. Why? Because the rest of the snow will either (A) slide off the roof and cover your windshield as you're slowing down; or (B) fly off onto someone else's windshield and causing him or her to smash into you. That's not enough of a reason? Fine. Here's another: (C) it's the law in many states that your vehicle must be clear of snow and ice.

Clean your headlights. Even if you think they don't need it.

It goes without saying, that if your headlights are covered with six inches of sleet, you're not going to be seeing much past your hood ornament, nor are oncoming drivers going to see you as well. Salt, sand and other wintry crud can dramatically impair the effectiveness of your car's headlights, even long after the last snowstorm. Whether you're planning on driving at night or not, take a moment before every winter trip to clean off your headlights. At home, we suggest you have a squeegee or paper towels stored in your garage, so you don't have an excuse not to wipe the film off your headlights, before you take off. When that last remaining wooly mammoth runs out into the middle of the road some night, you'll thank yourself.

17. When driving in the snow, do everything slowly.

Even with good coolant, snow tires, stability control, all-wheel drive, and the bag of Doritos in the trunk, keep in mind that driving in snow, sleet, and ice is very treacherous. And even if you maintain control of your car, not everyone else will. So don't ever get lulled into a false sense of security. Do everything slowly and gently. Remember, in the snow, the tires are always just barely grabbing the road. Accelerate slowly and gently, turn slowly and gently, and brake slowly and gently. To do this, you have to anticipate turns and stops. That means what? Going slowly and leaving plenty of distance between you and other cars. Rapid movements lead to skids and loss of control. Drive as if there were eggs on the bottoms of your feet - step on the gas and the brake pedals so gently that you don't break the eggshell.

If you're nervous about driving in winter, consider spending some time practicing. Go to an empty parking lot and try sending the car into a little skid on purpose. Slam on the brakes, then practice turning into the skid and see what happens - and practice until you're comfortable regaining control of the car. Doing this in a large, empty parking lot (preferably without light poles) allows you the luxury of skidding without ending up flat on your back, looking up into the eyes of seven different EMTs. The more comfortable you are maintaining control and regaining control, the better a winter driver you'll be. Oh, and one more thing. Don't forget your laptop computer with the cellular Internet connection so you can kill time here at Car Talk while you're waiting for the tow truck.

18. If you're thinking about a new car, think about safety features that will help in lousy weather.

If you're looking at buying a new car, consider buying one with features that will help you when road conditions stink, such as anti-lock brakes and vehicle stability control.

Vehicle stability control, a relatively recent safety addition, has been shown to prevent accidents during treacherous or otherwise dangerous driving conditions. It doesn't give you license to drive recklessly in poor conditions, but it will give you an added degree of safety. We recommend it.

Finally, if you really have to drive a lot in the snow, all-wheel drive is a good option. If you just drive in the snow a few days a year, front-wheel drive is fine - and you'll get better fuel economy and save a heap of money on repairs over the years.

To see the full Car Talk Winter Driving Tips feature, and other Car Talk features, drop by the Car Talk web site.

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