

Winter Safety

By Julia Brooks and Stacey Cave

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Having hemophilia A doesn't mean you can't get outside and enjoy Canada's wonderful winters. It's important to have fun and keep moving, even when the weather is cold and snowy. We put together four videos to help you get the most of winter in a way that's safe and best suited for you.

This article is available in video format.

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Consider Your Options

- As someone with hemophilia, you know it's important to stay fit year-round, but when winter blows in with its changes in scenery and serious temperature drops, getting exercise outside can be a challenge. There are actually lots of fun ways to keep moving through the cold months. Whether it's clearing snow from your walk or hitting the slopes, the secret is to find the option that's right for you.
- Look for an activity that appeals to you and seems like a good fit with your target joints or muscles. Your hemophilia treatment center physiotherapist can help you decide the level of risk that's best for you.
- Snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, shovelling, and walking are among the safest winter options because they have fewer risks related to height, speed, or contact with other people.
- Skating can be a fun choice though it does involve some risk due to the hard ice surface, speed, and high chance of falls.
- Downhill activities like skiing, snowboarding, and tobogganing may be appealing, but they're associated with speed and a higher risk of falls, which can result in injuries and bleeding.



Preparation

- No matter what winter activity you choose, preparation — and the earlier the better — is key for preventing bleeds.
- Before the season starts, work with your physiotherapist to build a strength and flexibility program that's designed specifically for you.
- Talk to your hemophilia treatment center team to make sure your chosen activity will be safe.
- If your chosen activity is a new one for you, schedule some lessons to get you started and learn the safest techniques.
- Make plans to do your activity with at least one other person so you're always with a buddy.
- Children with bleeding disorders should always stick with their parents and group. If they'll instead be with friends, make sure someone in that group knows they have hemophilia.
- If you're on a prophylactic regime, check with your healthcare team to make sure your dose is the right one for the activity you've chosen. They may suggest you schedule your outings on the same day as your dose.
- Bring a major dose with you, and make sure your buddy knows where it is located in case something happens.
- Warm up with a few minutes of gentle exercise before jumping straight into your activity. This will make joints and muscles less likely to bleed. Talk to your physiotherapist for a plan that's suited to you.



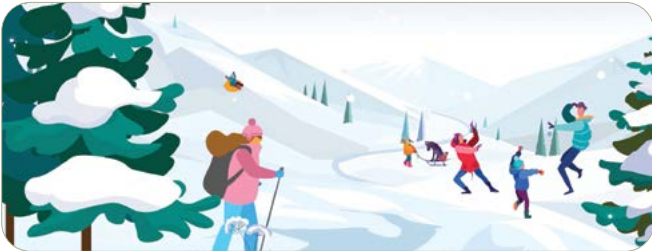
Equipment

- Having the right gear is a big part of staying safe.
- A good helmet is the most crucial piece of equipment. Your brain is a vital organ and needs to be well protected. Make sure you use the correct type of helmet based on your activity and wear it as instructed. You'll need a helmet for any activity with speed, contact, or risk of falls, such as skating, skiing, snowboarding, and tobogganing.
- If you have medical alert jewelry, wear it (if it's safe to) or place it in an accessible pocket.
- For skiing or snowboarding, make sure you're wearing equipment that's been properly fitted.
- Wearing appropriate footwear with good grip can help prevent falls, especially if you live in a place where it tends to get a lot of snow and ice.
- If you have target ankle joints, think about wearing ankle braces or a high ankle style boot.
- If you know you'll be walking on slippery surfaces, consider wearing spikes that attach to your footwear or use a walking pole for additional support.



Outdoor Safety

- Once you've prepped and outfitted yourself with the safest equipment, here are a few ways to lower your chances of experiencing a bleed even further.
- Bundle up for the weather. Keep joints and muscles warm and dry by wearing the appropriate clothing for the activity, temperature, and amount of time you'll be outside.
- If the weather is extreme, terrain is icy, or visibility is low, wait for another day with better weather.
- Follow only the trails that suit your skill level. Consider trails where you can stay in bounds and away from trees.
- In areas with snow or ice, shovel clear paths and use salt on icy patches to prevent falls. If you're shovelling, try to avoid twisting to toss the snow and use your legs rather than your back as much as possible. Move smaller amounts of snow at a time.
- Walk like a penguin! That means shuffling your feet rather than taking large steps and keep a small bend in your knees. It may feel silly, but it does help you avoid falling when you find yourself on slippery surfaces.
- Don't let winter keep you inside. Following these tips and recommendations can help you get out into Canada's beautiful winter wonderland safely. Enjoy!



About the Authors



Julia is a pediatric physiotherapist at the Alberta Children's Hospital. She received her Bachelor of Medical Rehabilitation, Physical Therapy (BMRPT) in 2003 from the University of Manitoba. She has published on subjects such as Exercise Therapy in Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis, Assessment of Joint and Muscle Bleeds, and Standards of Care and Clinical Practice Guidelines for Persons with Hemophilia. She is currently the President of the Canadian Physiotherapists in Hemophilia Care, and on the committee of the Canadian Bleeding Disorders Registry (CBDR), as well as the Parents Empowering Parents committee.



Stacey is an adult physiotherapist at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver, British Columbia. She has been working for Providence Health Care since the fall of 2012 in a variety of areas including acute, rehab, outpatients, and geriatrics. Before her hemophilia role, she worked with the Complex Pain Outpatient team where she spent several years developing a pain self-management program with her coworkers. She continues to have an interest in complex pain management in her bleeding disorders role. She graduated from the University of British Columbia's Master of Physical Therapy program in 2012 and has returned as a Clinical Instructor with the program to continue to support the MPT students in their learning process. Stacey started with the Adult Bleeding Disorders Program in the fall of 2018. She works three days a week with the program, in conjunction with her other caseload in geriatrics.

