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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Be Careful on Icy Sidewalks

During these winter months, the sidewalks and roads are generally very icy. This makes people, particularly the elderly, vulnerable to slipping and falling. I have had numerous patients in my office already this winter with injuries from slipping on icy winter sidewalks. I would like to tell what some of them are and then give a few ideas to prevent these injuries from happening in the first place.

One of the easiest ways to knock some teeth out, fracture your jaw, give yourself a concussion, and top it off with some quality road rash (scrapes/cuts) on your face is to walk on icy surfaces with your hands deep in your pockets. Whenever you lose your balance, you have an inherent reflex to extend out your hands in order to catch yourself. If you cannot get your hands out of your pockets in time, one of the first things to hit the ground could be your shoulders, face, or head.

When venturing outside in these winter months, wear shoes that have a good tread on the bottom. If you are wearing smooth surfaced shoes, you are asking for trouble. As an example, I will tell you about a particular businessperson in Merritt. He did not see the need to change out of his perfectly smooth bottomed dress shoes before going outside onto the icy conditions. He is presently walking with extreme pain and can only sit if he uses a "not so trendy" donut shaped pillow. The suffering he will endure for the next month from a fractured tailbone may have been prevented if he had proper footwear.

If you require a cane when walking, it may be prone to sliding out from under you when on icy surfaces. Particularly in the elderly, this unexpected shift in your balance may make you fall. Purchasing a small metal item that clamps onto the end of your cane can prevent this. It has a set of sharp teeth that flip over the rubber knob at the end of the cane. Then, when you put your weight on it, the teeth bite securely into any icy surface. Recently, I had a patient in my office whose cane slipped out from under her. She fell and attempted to catch herself with her free hand. It was quite obvious when she saw me that she had fractured her wrist.

Many elderly people or those with balance disorders such as Alzheimer's disease or vertigo may require the use of a walker when on slippery or uneven surfaces. This gives them the security of being able to lean on a stable structure if they slip or lose their

balance slightly. Only last week, I spoke to an elderly man in my office that has balance problems due to Alzheimer's disease. He slipped on an icy sidewalk and the bridge of his nose struck one of the wooden benches located on our main street. Although he said it was not a big deal, I believe he had a broken nose and I am confident he should have had the laceration stitched.

In addition to taking the necessary precautions for yourself when walking on icy surfaces, there are things you can do for other people as well. First and foremost, shovel the snow off the sidewalk in front of your home or business. You could also spread sand or salt on the icy sections to prevent others from slipping on your section of sidewalk.

If you are unfortunate enough to have a fall, or even to just slip without actually hitting the ground, it is likely that you have jarred or strained your neck, back, or shoulders. The discomfort may show up immediately or possibly not for a few days. If one or more of the joints in your spine or neighbouring muscles remain restricted in their movement, then that area will be vulnerable to becoming sore at a later date. Thus, if you do slip, even without completely falling, see your chiropractor for a complete examination.