

Happy Holidays!

Between the war, the interminable election advertisements, trouble in Pakistan, China, and Mumbai, hurricanes, the economy, AIG, Citibank and the big three auto makers, gas prices, foreclosures, Sallie Mae and Freddie Mac and the prospect of a world without George Carlin or Paul Newman, we suspect that our farewell to 2008 will not be as fond as our "Welcome 2009!" A new year is just what we need. May yours be merry and bright! ♥

A Kinder, Gentler Social Security Administration

In October, the Social Security Administration announced a Compassionate Allowances initiative. The new plan expedites disability claims for applicants with severe medical conditions, virtually eliminating the wait for benefits which, in the past, have taken years to process.

Streamlining the application for benefits, the program recognizes 25 rare diseases and 25 cancers. You can find a list of these conditions at:

www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances ♥

Baby, It's Cold Outside!

*"Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if I had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice."* —Robert Frost, *Fire & Ice*

And now, just in time for winter, we are prepared to answer this age-old question: It would be preferable to perish by ice than by fire. Death by cold is a more merciful way to go because, after the initial discomfort of being chilly, you simply slip into a coma and settle down for the *Big Sleep*. Hell is not portrayed as a place of fire and brimstone for nothing!

The Old Farmer's Almanac predicts a colder, snowier winter of 2009 than usual, and all four of the major Philadelphia area networks are calling for above average snowfall (19" - 35") and below average temperatures. According to the National Climatic Data Center, in the recorded weather history of the Delaware Valley, Pennsylvania wins the "coldness" prize for -42 degrees Fahrenheit, New Jersey comes in with -34 and Delaware registers with -17 degrees. On the whole, we live in a comparatively temperate region, and our handy dandy tips



will help you to take care of yourself when the mercury dips.

According to Slate Magazine (11/16/2003), more people die in December, January and February than any other months of the year, and not because they freeze to death, but because extreme cold exacerbates the symptoms of heart attack and stroke, the nation's #1 and #3 killers. In its bid to survive, your body reacts to the cold by constricting blood vessels which reduces the flow of blood to the skin where body heat evaporates, and causes your blood pressure to rise and your circulatory system to slow down. The constricted blood vessels provide a smaller passage for blood to flow through, and so it pools, appearing blue in your lips and nails. Using the ingenious tools at its disposal, your body generates heat by shivering, utilizing muscle mass as fuel.

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Frost nip is a superficial and temporary injury of the skin surface which, when ignored, becomes frost bite. Prolonged exposure to temperatures below 32 degrees Fahrenheit can cause skin to freeze. When cold and wet come together, your body releases histamines that constrict blood vessels in the skin; deprived of blood, skin blackens, tissue dies and falls off.

Hypothermia occurs when the body's internal temperature drops below 90 degrees, causing confusion, trembling and drowsiness. Ultimately, the heart and brain falter and death comes from the resulting heart arrhythmia.

Goose Bumps, scientifically known as “Horripilation,” is a phenomenon of the nervous system and serves no identifiable purpose in humans, although the contracting of the tiny muscles at the base of the hair follicle is thought to make a fur-covered beast appear larger to his enemies in a time of crisis.

The intensely compelling study of cryobiology – life and death at low temperatures - is filled with examples of trees, bugs, lichens, snakes, salamanders and turtles who produce a kind of an antifreeze to protect themselves from extreme cold and live through lethal weather. Humans, however, need a plan.

1. Stay dry. Your insulating properties are compromised by moisture.

2. As most of your body heat escapes through your head, wear a hat.

3. Wear several layers of clothing which serve to wick away moisture and hold in body heat. Your outer layer should be waterproof.

4. Mittens are better than gloves because they allow your fingers to stay cozy together.

5. Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of non-alcoholic beverages. Caffeine, alcohol and tobacco lower your body temperature. Drinking hot beverages tricks your body's inner thermostat into thinking that you're toasty. Luke warm beverages are best.

6. Keep moving but don't get fatigued. More than 70% of deaths related to cold are male. 50% are 60+ years old. When shoveling snow or doing outdoor winter chores, know

your limitations and don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it.

7. Be mindful that numbness in your extremities is a sign of frost nip, the first symptom on the slippery slope to real trouble.

8. Treat the red-skinned, tingly symptoms of frost nip by removing wet clothing and placing chilled body parts in warm – not hot - water until all sensation returns (usually after half an hour).

9. Frost bite is characterized by white, waxy skin that feels hard. Until skilled help arrives, do not rub or rub snow on the affected areas. Immerse the patient in warm water or warm water compresses. Re-warming causes a painful burning which might result in blistering or swelling. Skin is thawed when it is pink and no longer numb. Cover blisters with sterile wrap and seek out professional medical help as soon as possible.

10. Put matches, a blanket, a shovel, a flashlight and a supply of non-perishable emergency food in the trunk of your car. 70% of cold weather deaths occur in automobiles. A cell phone is a good idea, too.

11. The body's ability to keep blood away from the skin – its major weapon in regulating body temperature – is compromised by the pharmaceutical alpha and beta blockers taken for high blood pressure.

12. Until skilled help arrives, a hypothermia victim should be placed in a horizontal position on dry material and covered with a warm blanket or coat. Warm the casualty's torso first, using your own body heat if necessary. Do not warm the extremities first as this pushes cold blood towards the heart and can lead to heart failure.

Fresh snow is an excellent insulator. In a pinch, a snow fort might save your life.

Great Britain's Department of Health and Health Protection Agency (HPA) conducted a study that looked at heat and cold related deaths in light of the warming trends from 1971 through 2003. They found no change in the number of summer deaths, but winter deaths dropped by 3%. We might, then, extrapolate that an increase of about 3 degrees Fahrenheit by the middle of this century would drop cold-related deaths by 25% - the only good news you're likely to hear about the impact of Global Warming! ♥

Cash & Counseling

A new program from Medicaid allows seniors to be paid directly for in-home care coverage and incidentals such as safety equipment, meal delivery or transportation. Depending upon Medicaid's assessment of need and the prevailing pay rate for local home care, the Cash & Counseling program allows seniors to call their own shots and to choose their own care provider, including family members.

Currently available in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, Cash & Counseling offers more autonomy to Medicaid recipients. To find out more about the New Jersey program, which is called Personal Preference, visit www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dds. Information about the Pennsylvania programs, Services My Way, go to www.ohcr.state.pa.us/assets/pdfs/cashcounselinggrant.pdf.

Websites We Love

<http://www.noaa.gov/wx.html>

The National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration's website is all weather all the time.

<http://www.weather.com>

The Weather Channel's website is an embarrassment of weather riches including, but not limited to the history of weather, ski forecasts, weird and wacky weather trivia and current conditions.

<http://weather-warehouse.com>

The most comprehensive weather database online. ♥

Healthcare Coordination and Advocacy



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