

Cold Weather Tips

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People experience their own unique comfort zones, established by regions in the hypothalamus (brain) and regulated by muscle mass, fat distribution, hormones, and metabolism. For these reasons and more, individuals with Prader-Willi Syndrome need extra consideration and protection in cold and hot climates. World-wide, cold temperatures are a far greater risk than hot weather. Blood thickens during cold weather, and this can lead to blood clots which are a known health risk in PWS, unrelated to cold exposure.

Think three layers – even for a car ride. Keep a fleece blanket in the car to wrap up your passenger until the car heats up.

- **Inner layer** that wicks sweat away from the skin - lightweight wool, polyester, or polypropylene (polypro). Never wear cotton in cold weather as it absorbs moisture and keeps it next to your skin.
- **Middle layers** that insulate and keep heat in - polyester fleece, wool, microfiber insulation, or down.
- **Outer layer** that repels wind, snow, and rain.

Hands and feet get too cold quickly, so check fingers and toes frequently when outside. Feet should have at least two layers. Many hands are warmer in mittens than in gloves and should have three layers. Make sure children keep their mittens on and keep moving when they are outside – make a game of wiggling fingers and toes.

Cover the neck and head – The large blood vessels in the neck should be completely covered as they are a source of heat loss when left exposed. A turtleneck shirt, a high collared warm coat, and a muffler or turtle fleece will give the three layers needed. Hats should be chosen for ear protection and should be double layered.

Warm internally – a warm drink upon coming indoors will heat from the inside out. Take off the outer layer and adjust to the indoors before stripping off the other layers. Use fingers and toes as an indicator of good core temperature.

Heat packets (HotHands) can help preheat boots or be kept in a coat pocket to warm cold fingers. Keep some of these in your car for safety and comfort.

Be sure to review our handout on Hypothermia and Prader-Willi Syndrome – An Overview by Barb Dorn.

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