

ST. NICHOLAS HOSPITAL HEALTHSOURCE

Beware of Hypothermia

Cold weather brings the danger of over exposure or hypothermia. When your body temperature drops 4° F (or more) below normal, you are in danger.

Those most at risk for hypothermia are small children and the elderly. Cold temperatures can quickly deplete their energy reserves and they are often not able to maintain an even temperature in cold surroundings. Certain medications such as tranquilizers, cardiovascular drugs, sedatives, and antidepressants may also increase the risk for hypothermia.

Symptoms come on gradually and typically progress in this order: cold feet, hands, and face then shivering, listlessness, drowsiness, confusion, poor coordination, slow shallow breathing, slowed or irregular heartbeat, then loss of consciousness or even loss of heartbeat.

If you find someone you suspect is suffering from hypothermia, dial 911 for emergency assistance. While waiting for the medical help to arrive:

- Start CPR (if the person is not breathing)
- Remove cold, wet clothing and wrap the person in warm blankets.
- If you must remain outdoors, cover the person's head and keep him/her from direct contact with the cold ground.

Trained medical personnel should re-warm the person however if this is not possible you can begin the process slowly by covering him/her lightly with blankets, giving warm (not hot) liquids, and a warm (not hot) bath. Be sure to stay calm and do not re-warm too quickly. If a person is re-warmed too quickly, his/her blood will rush to the surface of his/her body and away from vital organs that need the blood.

To prevent hypothermia from happening to you:

- Wear several layers of warm, loose clothing.
- Wear a protective waterproof and windproof outer garment.
- Keep your head and neck covered to help retain body heat.
- Stay dry.
- Do not drink alcoholic beverages.

Knowing the symptoms of hypothermia and how to act in an emergency can save a person's life.



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