

How to prevent hypothermia

What is hypothermia?

Hypothermia is a condition in which a person's body temperature has dropped significantly below normal. This occurs from inadequate protection against exposure to cold temperatures. The very young and elderly are the most susceptible to developing hypothermia when exposed to cold temperatures.

The risk and extent of hypothermia is directly influenced by presence of wet clothing, contact with metals, wind-chill, and extent of temperature gradient between the body and its surroundings. Vulnerability is increased when circulation is impaired by cardiovascular disease, alcohol intake, exhaustion, and/or hunger.

What are the symptoms of hypothermia?

- Uncontrolled shivering
- Slow or unclear speech
- Feeling extremely tired
- Stumbling when attempting to walk
- Confusion (person cannot think clearly)
- Semi-consciousness or unconsciousness

What should I do if someone has hypothermia?

- If a person becomes unconscious, get medical help immediately. If cardiac arrest (heart attack) has occurred, have someone call for medical assistance and then apply CPR.
- **WARNING:** Do not warm the person too fast.
- Bring the person indoors or to a dry place protected from the wind.
- Remove wet clothing and cover the person with dry blankets. Make sure to cover the head, hands, and feet.
- Put the person in a cot or bed next to a warm -- not hot -- heater.

- Lie under the covers next to the person to transfer your own body heat. If possible, have someone else lie on the other side.
- Give the person warm -- not hot -- broth or soup. Do not give alcohol to drink.
- Wrap an infant inside your own clothing against your skin.

How can I prevent hypothermia?

- Wear warm, multi-layered clothing with good hand and feet protection (avoid overly constricting wrist bands, socks, and shoes).
- Wear warm headgear. This is particularly important since significant heat is lost through an unprotected head.
- If possible, change into dry clothes whenever clothing becomes wet.
- Find appropriate shelter to stay warm.