

# Hypothermia

## *A Cold Weather Hazard*



**How to protect yourself  
and your neighbors  
during dangerous  
cold weather**

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# What is Hypothermia?



Hypothermia is a serious condition that occurs when the body becomes too cold to function. Specifically, it is when a person's core body temperature becomes unusually low (below 96° F).

Body temperature is a balance between how much heat is produced and how much is lost. When exposed to cold or even moderately cool temperatures too long, the body loses heat faster than it can produce it, and symptoms associated with hypothermia occur. Severe hypothermia can cause an irregular heartbeat leading to heart failure and death.

## Who is at risk?

Anyone who is exposed to cold temperatures for an extended period of time is at risk of developing hypothermia. Special attention should be given to the following individuals during cold weather:

Infants and older adults (age 60 and over).

Those with severe arthritis, Parkinson's disease or other illnesses that limit activity.

Persons with medical problems such as heart disease, respiratory ailments, poor circulation, diabetes, memory disorders or mental illness.

Those who live alone or in cold, drafty or poorly insulated homes.

Persons living on a limited income whose health and safety may be compromised as a result.

# Warning Signs of Hypothermia

Hypothermia is a serious medical emergency that requires immediate attention. It is not always easy to tell if someone has hypothermia. Often the symptoms resemble those of other problems, and the victim may not know he or she has developed hypothermia. Hypothermia should be suspected if any of these signs are present:

Unusually low body temperature (below 96°).

Uncontrollable shivering or a lack of shivering in a room that is 65° or colder.

Confusion, disorientation, irritability or sleepiness.

Pale and waxy skin; puffiness or swelling in the face.

Cold, stiff muscles.

Poor control over body movements; slow reactions.

Slurred speech and slow or shallow breathing.

Slow or irregular heartbeat.

Low blood pressure or a weak pulse.

A change in behavior during cold weather or a change in the way a person looks.

# First Aid for Hypothermia



Time is very important for a hypothermia victim. **Immediately call a doctor or 9-1-1 for help!** While you are waiting for medical help to arrive, here are a few steps you can take:

If it is possible, move the person to a warmer room or raise the the indoor temperature.

Protect the person from the cold with blankets, towels or extra clothing. Be sure to cover the head and neck.

Handle the person very gently. The skin is often very sensitive, and a sudden jolt may worsen his or her condition. Do **NOT** rub any part of the person's body.

If the person is conscious and reactive, administer small amounts of warm liquids or food. Do **NOT** give any drugs or alcohol.

## MEDICAL WARNING



Contact your doctor to discuss the effect that cold weather may have on your health and the medications you are taking. Because certain medications can affect your body's ability to warm itself, you may need to take special precautions to avoid hypothermia.

**Do NOT stop taking medications without your doctor's approval.**

# Cold Weather Safety Tips

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**Wear several light layers of clothing instead of one thick one.** The layers will help to trap body heat and keep you warm. Also use blankets to insulate your body.

**Wear a hat.** Over 40% of your body's heat is lost from your head, so it is a good idea to wear a hat—even inside the house.



**Stay active.** Walk or exercise as much as your health will sensibly allow.

**Eat a well balanced diet.**

Nutritious food will help you stay healthy. If you are healthy, it will be easier for your body to keep warm.



**Set the thermostat at 70 degrees.** While it is important to conserve energy, prolonged exposure to indoor temperatures of 65° or less during the winter can lead to hypothermia.

**Don't sit near drafty windows.** Cover the windows with plastic to keep the cold out. Make sure storm windows are closed.

**Open your draperies on sunny days to let sunlight help heat your home.** Close them at night to keep the cold out.

**Keep in touch with friends or relatives.** During cold weather, let people know how you are feeling; check in with someone once or twice each day.



# EnergyCare



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**E**nergyCare is a non-profit organization that helps low-income people safely survive their energy-related struggles, especially during the extremes of summer and winter weather.

## **Our Programs and Services**

**Telephone Helpline:** EnergyCare operates a year-round telephone helpline to connect people with sources of private and public energy assistance funds and to provide weather-related safety information.

**Winter Warming Program:** For the elderly and medically at-risk, EnergyCare delivers blankets and heaters and installs energy-saving weatherization materials. We also facilitate minor furnace repairs for low-income, elderly homeowners.

**Summer Cooling Program:** EnergyCare installs window air conditioners in the homes of those most vulnerable to the summer's dangerous heat.

**For more information or to access our services, please contact:**

**(314) 773-5900**

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