



TakeCharge

WELCOA'S ONLINE SELF-CARE BULLETIN

BEATING THE COLD WEATHER

For a good portion of the country cold temperatures are right around the corner, if they're not here already! And did you know that cold weather can lower the temperature inside your body? This drop in body temperature is called hypothermia (hi-po-ther-mee-uh), and it can be deadly if not treated quickly. Hypothermia can happen anywhere—not just outside and not just in northern states. In fact, some people (especially older adults) can have a mild form of hypothermia if the temperature in their home is too cool.

What Are the Signs of Hypothermia?

When you think about being cold, you probably think of shivering. That is one way the body stays warm when it gets cold. But, shivering alone does not mean you have hypothermia.

How do you know if someone has hypothermia? Look for the “umbles”—stumbles, mumbles, fumbles, and grumbles—these show that the cold is a problem. Check for:

- Confusion or sleepiness
- Slowed, slurred speech, or shallow breathing
- Weak pulse
- Change in behavior or in the way a person looks
- A lot of shivering or no shivering; stiffness in the arms or legs
- Poor control over body movements or slow reactions

Taking Action

A normal body temperature is 98.6 °F. A few degrees lower, for example, 95 °F, can be dangerous. It may cause an irregular heartbeat leading to heart problems and death.

A BODY TEMP ONLY A FEW DEGREES LOWER THAN NORMAL CAN BE DANGEROUS AND MAY CAUSE AN IRREGULAR HEARTBEAT LEADING TO HEART PROBLEMS AND DEATH.



Next Page
↓



TakeCharge

WELCOA'S ONLINE SELF-CARE BULLETIN

Continued from previous page

If you think someone could have hypothermia, use a thermometer to take his or her temperature. Make sure you shake the thermometer so it starts below its lowest point. When you take the temperature, if the reading doesn't rise above 96 °F, call for emergency help. In many areas, that means calling 911.

While you are waiting for help to arrive, keep the person warm and dry. Try and move him or her to a warmer place. Wrap the person in blankets, towels, coats—whatever is handy. Even your own body warmth will help. Lie close, but be gentle. Give the person something warm to drink but stay away from alcohol or caffeinated drinks, like regular coffee.

Health Problems

Some illnesses may make it harder for your body to stay warm. These include problems with your body's hormone system such as low thyroid hormone (hypothyroidism), health problems that keep blood from flowing normally (like diabetes), and some skin problems where your body loses more heat than normal.

Some health problems may make it hard for you to put on more clothes, use a blanket, or get out of the cold. For example:

- Severe arthritis, Parkinson's disease, or other illnesses that make it tough to move around
- Stroke or other illnesses that can leave you paralyzed and may make clear thinking more difficult
- Memory loss
- A fall or other injury

How Do I Stay Safe?

- Pay attention to how cold it is where you are. Check the weather forecasts for windy and cold weather.
- Try to stay inside or in a warm place on cold and windy days. If you have to go out, wear warm clothes including a hat and gloves. A waterproof coat or jacket can help you stay warm if it's cold and snowy.
- Wear several layers of loose clothing when it's cold. The layers will trap warm air between them. Don't wear tight clothing because it can keep your blood from flowing freely. This can lead to loss of body heat.
- Don't make the mistake of thinking alcoholic drinks will keep you warm. Alcoholic drinks can make you lose body heat.

★ **DRINK ALCOHOL MODERATELY, IF AT ALL.
ALCOHOLIC DRINKS CAN MAKE YOU LOSE BODY HEAT.**