

# HYPOTHERMIA



## ■ ■ ■ Description

Normal body temperature is between 97.2°F (36.2°C) and 99.5°F (37.5°C). When the body temperature falls to less than 95°F (35°C), hypothermia results. This causes the body's metabolism to slow down and may be fatal if left untreated. Body temperature increases during exercise, but more energy reserves are used to produce body heat; once these reserves are depleted, the athlete is at higher risk for hypothermia. In water at a temperature of 50°F (10°C), an average person may be able to swim only 1 km before experiencing hypothermia.

## ■ ■ ■ Common Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms may last 3 to 12 hours.

- Usually starts with cold fingers and toes
- Shivering (may not be present in the elderly)
- Heart pounds, then slows
- Breathing is fast and then may slow
- Need to urinate urgently
- Fatigue
- Poor coordination
- Confusion
- Shock
- Irregular heartbeat

## ■ ■ ■ Risk Factors

- Any altitude, as long as the ambient environment is colder than your core body temperature
- Small children and the elderly
- Drug use
- Alcohol abuse
- Inability to move around or remain alert
- Medicines such as tranquilizers, cardiovascular drugs, sedatives, and antidepressants

## ■ ■ ■ Preventive Measures

Hypothermia is a potentially life-threatening condition, so all precautions should be taken if possible:

- Wear several *layers* of warm, loose clothing.
- Don't forget to wear a hat (to retain body heat).
- Wear a protective waterproof and windproof outer garment to stay as dry as possible.
- Do not drink alcoholic beverages.
- Know the symptoms of hypothermia and the emergency treatment for it.

- Have on hand space blankets (sheets of plastic and aluminum that help retain heat) and high-energy food in case of an emergency.
- Make sure to have adequate liquids to avoid dehydration.
- Finally, use common sense. Recognize and avoid high-risk situations.

## ■ ■ ■ General Treatment Considerations

First, get emergency medical help. Dial 911 or call an ambulance, then do the following while waiting for medical help:

- If the person is not breathing, start rescue breathing (cardiopulmonary resuscitation [CPR] or artificial respiration).
- Take off cold, wet clothing.
- Wrap the person in warm blankets or other coverings. If you must remain outdoors, cover the person's head and keep him or her from direct contact with the cold ground.
- As soon as possible, move the person carefully to a warm place and begin rewarming.
- Rewarming must be done slowly to prevent a rush of blood to the surface of the body and away from vital organs that need blood. If rewarming cannot be done by trained medical personnel, do the following:
  - Remove any damp clothes and dress the person in dry clothes or cover the person lightly with blankets.
  - Give warm liquids to drink (do not give anything by mouth if the person is confused).
  - Allow the person to warm up gradually in a warm room.
  - Give the person a warm (*not* hot) bath. Immerse the trunk only with the extremities out.

## ■ ■ ■ Things Not To Do

- Do not give the person hot liquids to drink.
- Do not force the person to eat or drink anything.
- Do not give alcoholic beverages.
- Do not try to warm cold skin by rubbing or massaging.
- Do not cover the person with heavy layers of blankets.
- Do not allow the person to walk.
- Do not use hot water bottles, heating pads, or electric blankets.

Notes:

(Up to 4400 characters only)

Notes and suggestions