

A Message For Older Adults

COLD WEATHER SPELLS DANGER

HYPOTHERMIA

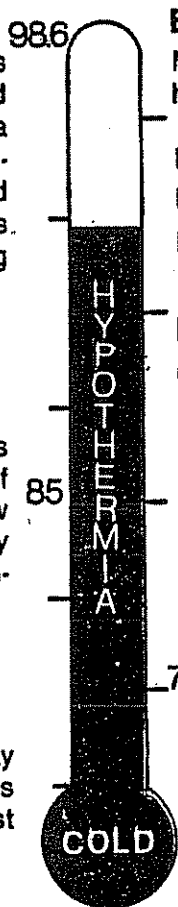
Winter creates a special danger for older adults because many are vulnerable to cold. In cold weather, millions of older people risk developing a dangerous condition called Hypothermia. Hypothermia means low body temperature. It is caused by exposure to cold. The most common victims are older persons who have difficulty keeping themselves or their homes warm.

BODY HEAT

In order for your body to work properly, its temperature needs to be around 98.6°F (37°C). If cold causes your body temperature to drop below 95°F, your heart begins to slow down, your body becomes weak, and your mind becomes confused. You could die.

PREVENTION

The best way to *prevent hypothermia* is to stay warm. If room temperatures are cool or cold, dress warmly. This is your strongest defense against hypothermia.



BE ALERT

Many things can increase the risk of becoming hypothermic.

- Living In A Cold House
- Poor Diet
- Alcohol
- Stroke or Diabetes
- Taking Certain Prescription Drugs

FACTS ABOUT THE COLD

- Temperatures do not have to be below freezing for hypothermia to develop.
- Room temperatures below 70°F could be dangerous if you are not dressed warmly enough.
- One of the most dangerous things about hypothermia is that it causes your mind to become confused. This prevents you from recognizing the danger and seeking help.
- Many older adults die in their own homes without ever reaching the hospital because friends and relatives do not recognize that they have hypothermia until it is too late.

HOT TIPS FOR COLD WEATHER

DRESS WARMLY

- Wear several layers of clothes. Avoid tight clothing. Loose clothes will trap a lot more warm air around your body. Mittens are warmer than gloves.
- Keep your clothes dry and change long underwear or socks if they become damp or wet.
- Wear a windproof outer layer when you are outdoors.

KEEP YOUR HANDS AND FEET WARM

- If your hands and feet are cold, put on a hat. This will cause your body to send more warm blood to the hands and feet. Use a warm scarf to cover your neck.

AT NIGHT

- Hot water bottles, heating pads and electric blankets will help to keep your bed warm. Wear a nightcap.

CLOTHING: WHAT TO WEAR

- Wool is a popular material for cold because it will keep you warmer than cotton when damp or wet.
- Most synthetics are very similar to wool when damp or wet and are therefore better than cotton.
- Down or quilted synthetic clothes also provide good protection from the cold.

DANGER SIGNALS

If you see an older relative or friend *with any of these signs*, it could mean that they are suffering from hypothermia.

- Confusion
- Puffy Face
- Difficulty Speaking
- Stomach Cold To Touch
- Shivering
- Forgetfulness
- Slow Breathing
- Trembling On One Side Of The Body Or In One Arm Or Leg.
- Sleepy and Hard To Wake Up
- Cold, Stiff Muscles

NUTRITION

Good nutrition is very important, especially in winter. Food provides the fuel your body needs to keep warm. Hot, nourishing meals and warm drinks add heat to your body.

DRUGS

Many prescription drugs can make you much more vulnerable to the cold. If you take medication for high blood pressure, nervousness, depression or sleeping, and you have trouble keeping warm, check with your doctor or pharmacist.

FOR HELP

- WITH HEATING YOUR HOME:** Contact your local fuel assistance program. They may be able to provide money for fuel or help with home insulation.
- WITH OTHER SERVICES:** Contact your State or Area Agency on Aging. They can direct you to many services that are available in your community.

IN AN EMERGENCY— WHAT YOU CAN DO

DO

- CALL A DOCTOR, AMBULANCE, RESCUE SQUAD OR LOCAL EMERGENCY ROOM
- HANDLE THE PERSON VERY GENTLY
- PROTECT THE PERSON FROM THE COLD WITH BLANKETS, QUILTS, TOWELS, OR EXTRA CLOTHES
- MAKE SURE THAT YOU COVER THE HEAD AND NECK

DO NOT

- DO NOT GIVE HOT DRINKS OR HOT FOOD
- DO NOT RAISE THE LEGS OR PLACE HOT WATER BOTTLES ON THE FEET
- DO NOT PLACE THE PERSON IN A HOT SHOWER OR BATH
- DO NOT GIVE ANY ALCOHOL OR DRUGS
- DO NOT MASSAGE THE ARMS OR LEGS.

This Material on Hypothermia Was Prepared By the Center For Environmental Physiology, In Cooperation With the Administration on Aging and The Older Americans Volunteer Programs/Action.