



Hypothermia

Being able recognize the symptoms and knowing the treatments for hypothermia can save a life

Hypothermia is defined as a deep body (core) temperature below 95°F. It may be mild (90-95), moderate (82-90°F), or severe (less than 82°F). Approximately 700 people in the U.S. die every year from this condition.

Hypothermia results when the body is exposed to a cold environment, preventing the maintenance of body core temperature. Common scenarios include inadequate heating in homes during the winter season, unanticipated exposure to cold as may occur following an accident or automobile failure, falling through the ice, or into the cold summer waters of the Great Lakes.

Often times, alcohol is involved, which directly contributes to the condition and prevents recognition of the symptoms of hypothermia. Symptoms of hypothermia include continual shivering, poor coordination, sluggishness, confused behavior, slurred or slow speech, hallucinations, and decreased attention span.

First aid measures include:

- Move the victim to a warm, sheltered, area
- Removing wet clothing and covering the victim with layers of dry clothing or blankets
- Encouraging body movement if the victim is conscious
- Feeding the victim with warm sweet solutions
- Warming the victim with body contact, skin to skin if necessary
- Application of warm compresses or exposure to a warm shower or tub bath with temperatures between 70°-110°F.
- Seek medical attention

The most important treatment for hypothermia is prevention. Here are some tips:

- If you lose heat in your house, call a friend, relative, social services, or 911.
- If you do winter sports, go with a companion or have a working cell phone with you.
- If you travel, carry a “survival kit” with you that includes warm clothes, a few “munchies,” etc.
- If you fall out of a boat, get back into it or on to it if you can. Cold water saps body heat 25 times faster than air of the same temperature.
- If you’re “out on the town” and have consumed alcohol, don’t walk or hitch-hike home. Get help. Alcohol and cold weather are a deadly combination.

Enjoy Wisconsin, enjoy winter! Following a little simple advice will keep you safe.