

Keeping Safe in the Cold

When body heat is lost to the cold faster than it can be replaced, there is a chance that the body's internal temperature may drop too low. Staying a long time in a cold place can be harmful for anyone, but it is most dangerous for infants and older adults.

How can hypothermia (low body temperature) be prevented?

- If you live alone, arrange for a daily check-in with a friend, relative, or neighbor.
- Insulate your home. Caulking is a good low-cost thing to do to help stop drafts and loss of heat from the home.
- Dress warmly (even indoors) and keep the head covered. Warm, loose clothing in layers is best because body heat can be trapped between layers.
- Stay dry. Moisture from sweat, rain, or melting snow can reduce or destroy the insulating value of clothing.
- Eat enough good food, and try to stay active.
- Avoid alcohol. Although drinks with alcohol may produce a false sense of warmth, alcohol actually reduces the body's ability to retain heat.
- Keep thermostats at 68 degrees or higher.
- Check with your medical provider about any health conditions or medications that might affect your body's temperature control.

What are the Symptoms of Hypothermia?

You might suspect hypothermia if a person:

- seems confused or drowsy, has slurred speech, or is unconscious
- feels cold to the touch but is not shivering.
- has a slow, irregular heartbeat.
- has shallow, slow breathing.

This is a medical emergency. Seek medical care immediately. Keep the person warm with blankets until help arrives.