

Frostbite & Hypothermia!

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Red Cross Pharmacy Wellness Newsletter



As the winter months blow in, it's important to remember to prepare yourself, and your friends and family, for the most common hazards of bitter cold.

Frostbite can affect any part of the body but in many cases strikes at small body parts that stick out from the rest like fingers and toes, or the ears and nose. Frostbite means that body part is truly frozen; the tissue now contains ice and is severely damaged.

Frostbitten skin tends to look pale and waxy, and is very firm and numb to any sensation.

Hypothermia happens if your body becomes cold enough that it can no longer heat itself up again. Without intervention to re-warm the body, it will become cooler and cooler until the condition becomes fatal.

A body temperature below 95°F (98.6°F is considered "normal") indicates serious hypothermia. Grumpiness, confusion, slurred speech, excessive tiredness, cold clammy skin, slow breathing or a slow or weak heartbeat can also be signs of hypothermia.

Both Frostbite and Hypothermia are emergency situations and should be treated seriously!

Handling Frostbite

Immediately come out of the cold and seek medical attention. Place frostbitten tissue in 100°F water for 20 to 45 minutes until thawed, and handle the tissue very gently.

Handling Hypothermia

Change any wet, cold clothes for dry clothes and get out of the cold. Lay down in blankets or other insulating fabrics safe for skin. Move gently and slowly, and have another person warm you with their body heat using skin to skin contact if available.

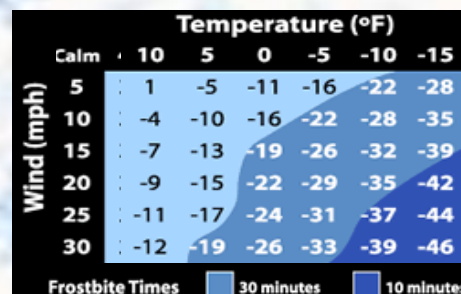
How Can I Protect Myself?

Limiting exposure to the cold is a good way to prevent frostbite or hypothermia. Try not to remain out in the cold for an extended time, and keep the temperature in your home at least 68°F. Periodically drinking warm, sweet, uncaffeinated and non-alcoholic beverages can also help protect the body from getting too cool. Be sure to wear well-insulated gloves and boots when outdoors and use a hat and scarf to protect the nose and ears. Water-proof clothes are best when handling snow, because wet clothes are 90% less cold-resistant.

Am I at Higher Risk?

Some medicines or medical conditions can increase the risk of being harmed by cold weather. If you take chronic medications for blood pressure or heart disease, or have hypothyroidism or diabetes, or are unsure if you may be at increased risk of frostbite or hypothermia, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about additional steps you can take to minimize risk. Also keep in mind that elderly people are less able to detect unsuitably cold environments, and that infants are less able to regulate their own body temperature. It may be wise to have a friend or member of family check in on them more often.

What Kind of Heat is Safe Heat? Another danger of cold weather is that people might try to keep themselves warm in an unsafe way. Electric generators are useful if the power goes out in a storm, but they should always be kept outside the house. Keeping them inside can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning. Also, lighting fires or grills in the home can easily get out of control and lead to a house fire. Space heaters with parts that visibly glow are also fire risks. If you use space heaters, or a fireplace, keep **at least** 3 feet of clearance around them to help prevent a fire. It is also important to have a smoke and carbon monoxide detector in your home and to regularly check the batteries in them.



adapted from NWS Windchill Chart