



HYPOTHERMIA AND FROSTBITE

Tips to prevent and treat cold-related health problems

Hypothermia: Easier to develop than you might think

Cold temperatures can cause hypothermia, which occurs when body temperature drops below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Warning signs include shivering, exhaustion, confusion, memory loss, and fumbling hands. Infants and [older adults](#) are especially at risk for hypothermia, as they have a harder time regulating their body temperature. Medical conditions in older adults can also make that problem worse. Hypothermia can lead to health problems like heart attacks, kidney problems, liver damage, or death.

Even a small drop in temperature or a short time spent outside can cause a large drop in body temperature in infants and older adults. And according to the [National Institute on Aging](#), living in a poorly heated home can cause hypothermia. To avoid developing hypothermia indoors, place a rolled towel in front of doors to keep out drafts, make sure windows are weather stripped or caulked if they have gaps, and keep indoor temperatures above 68 degrees Fahrenheit.

Frostbite: What to look for

Frostbite occurs when temperatures get cold enough that flesh begins freezing. Though frostbite can occur anywhere on the body, it typically affects exposed areas like the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, and toes. During early stages, you'll likely feel pins and needles in the affected areas, which will turn white. True frostbite causes the skin to appear waxy, hard, and cold to the touch.

Hypothermia doesn't just occur in frigid weather. Living in a poorly-heated home kept below 68 degrees F can be a risk for older populations.

SOURCE: National Institute on Aging

How to prevent hypothermia

To avoid hypothermia or frostbite when going outside:

- Dress in layers
- Wear warm clothing to protect your hands, feet, neck and face
- Get plenty of food and fluids
- Avoid alcoholic drinks

To prepare your car for a cold-weather emergency:

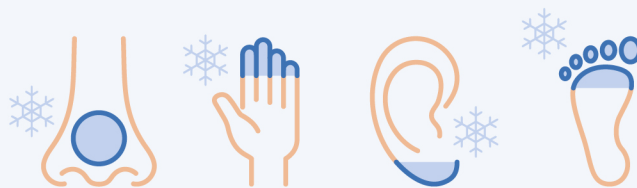
Make sure to have an emergency car kit with supplies like:

- Extra warm clothing and blankets
- An ice scraper
- A snow shovel
- Cat litter or sand to help tires grip on snow and ice
- Water and non-perishable food
- Jumper cables
- First aid kit with any necessary medicines and a pocketknife
- A battery-powered radio, a flashlight, and extra batteries
- Emergency flares or distress flags
- Waterproof matches and a can to melt snow for water

To prepare your home for a cold-weather emergency:

Make a disaster plan and prep your home for any winter weather by doing the following:

- Make sure you have important phone numbers — such as for your doctor and pharmacy — written down
- Prepare your home to keep out the cold with insulation, caulking, and weather stripping
- Gather supplies in case you need to stay home for several days without power
- If you plan to use your fireplace or wood stove for emergency heating, have your chimney or flue inspected each year



How to treat

Seek medical care as soon as possible and take the following steps:

Frostbite

- Get into a warm car or room
- Try not to walk on frostbitten feet or toes
- Put the frostbitten area in warm (not hot) water
- Use body heat, such as an armpit, to warm the frostbitten area
- Cover the area with a clean cloth - if your fingers or toes are frostbitten, wrap each one individually and keep them separated
- Don't rub the frostbitten area
- Avoid touching hot surfaces with the frostbitten area, as frostbite makes the area numb

Hypothermia

- Get to a warm car or room
- Remove any wet clothing
- Warm the core of the person's body (chest, neck, head, and groin) using an electric blanket or skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets
- Serve warm, non-alcoholic drinks
- Once body temperature has increased, wrap the individual in a warm blanket to help increase body temperature

SOURCE: National Library of Medicine