

Hypothermia: Staying Safe in Cold Weather

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Frigid weather can pose special risks to older adults. The National Institute on Aging (NIA), part of the National Institutes of Health, has some advice for helping older people avoid hypothermia -- when the body gets too cold -- during cold weather.

Hypothermia is defined as having a core body temperature of 96 degrees [Fahrenheit](#) or lower and can occur when the outside environment gets too cold or the body's heat production decreases. Older adults are especially vulnerable to [hypothermia](#) because their body's response to cold can be diminished by underlying medical conditions such as diabetes and some medicines, including over-the-counter cold remedies. Hypothermia can develop in older adults after relatively short exposure to [cold weather](#) or a small drop in temperature, because they may be less active and therefore generate less [body heat](#).

If you suspect that someone is suffering from the cold and you have a [thermometer](#) available, take his or her temperature. If it's 96 degrees F or lower, call 911 for immediate help. If you see someone who has been exposed to the cold and has the following symptoms: slowed or slurred speech, [sleepiness](#) or confusion, shivering or stiffness in the arms and legs, poor control over [body movements](#) or slow reactions, and a weak pulse, he or she may be suffering from hypothermia.

Here are a few tips to help you prevent hypothermia:

- Make sure your home is warm enough. Set your thermostat to at least 68 to 70 degrees F. Even mildly cool homes with temperatures from 60

to 65 degrees F can trigger hypothermia in older people.

- To stay warm at home, wear long underwear under your clothes, along with socks and slippers. Use a blanket or afghan to keep legs and shoulders warm and wear a hat or cap indoors.
- When venturing outside in the cold, it is important to wear a hat, scarf, and gloves or mittens to prevent loss of body heat through your head, hands and feet. A hat is particularly important because a large portion of body heat loss is through the head. Wear several layers of warm loose clothing to help trap warm air between the layers.
- Check with your doctor to see if any prescription or over-the-counter medications you are taking may increase your risk for hypothermia.

Provided by National Institutes of Health

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