

# HYPOTHERMIA: Risk Factors, Symptoms and Treatment

## WHAT IS HYPOTHERMIA?

Hypothermia is a condition where a person's body temperature falls below 35°C (95°F). It usually develops after exposure to abnormally low temperatures over a long period of time and, as it progresses, diminishes the body's ability to carry out normal metabolism and body functions. Help protect yourself and others by knowing how to prevent hypothermia, how to spot the signs and symptoms, and how to treat the condition. Those at highest risk for hypothermia include infants, heart patients, hypothyroid patients, the elderly and the mentally challenged.

## Recognizing Hypothermia

The symptoms of hypothermia include intense shivering, poor coordination and a slowing in pace or movement, confusion, slurred or thick speech, hallucinations or disorientation, pink and puffy face, dilation of pupils, feeling of deep cold, numbness and extreme fatigue. As hypothermia progresses, people may be too cold to shiver and experience a decrease in shivering followed by muscle rigidity.

## Prevention

- Wear many layers of clothing, long underwear, several pairs of socks and gloves or mittens.
- Wear a hat or toque on your head.
- Keep your arms and legs moving to generate heat.
- Avoid wet conditions. Stay dry and out of the rain or snow.
- Eat plenty of energy food (chocolate, sweets, dry fruit).
- Drink plenty of fluids and hot drinks.

## Treatment

- Prevent further heat loss by returning to shelter. Use top and bottom blankets, hot water bottles, and replace wet clothing with dry clothing.
- Keep moving your arms and legs to generate heat. **DO NOT RUB THE BODY!**
- Drink hot drinks and avoid alcohol and caffeine.
- Seek medical help immediately. Call for help or visit the emergency room.

**AVOID ALCOHOL, COFFEE, AND CIGARETTES before and during outside activities.**

**Alcohol can give you a false sense of warmth when, in fact, even more heat is being lost from the body.**

**HYPOTHERMIA CAN BE LIFE-THREATENING. Anyone with suspected hypothermia must be transported to the nearest hospital as soon as possible. Warm, dry clothing must be provided. Warm fluids by mouth may also be given. Upon arrival, immediately alert emergency room personnel to the potential hypothermia case.**

## Keeping Warm in Your Home

- Dress warmly. Wear socks, shoes or slippers, hats and extra clothing. All body parts should be covered.
- Keeping active and busy will keep you warm.
- Body temperature drops at night, so bundle up while sleeping by using extra blankets.
- Hot water bottles can be used to warm the bed, but remove them prior to sleeping to prevent burns.
- Family members should sleep in the same bed to keep warm from body heat, but do not sleep in waterbeds with children and infants as there is a risk of suffocation.



**Northwestern  
Health Unit**  
[www.nwhu.on.ca](http://www.nwhu.on.ca)

## QUESTIONS?

Contact a Public Health Inspector at one of these Northwestern Health Unit offices:

**KENORA**  
Phone: (807) 468-3147  
OR 1-800-830-5978

**DRYDEN**  
Phone: (807) 223-3301  
OR 1-888-404-4231

**FORT FRANCES**  
Phone: (807) 274-9827  
OR 1-800-461-3348