

Hypothermia

Defined as a core temperature of less than 95 degrees F.

Mild hypothermia: shivering, slurred speech, fatigue, lethargy, diminished judgment, and “*umbles*” (stumbles, mumbles, fumbles, and grumbles).

Moderate hypothermia: (<92 F.) Loss of shivering, depressed central nervous system.

Severe hypothermia: (<86 F.) Person looks dead, barely breathing, no pulse found, “metabolic icebox”.

Prevention

COLD: C = cover, provide adequate

O = overexertion, avoid because of increased sweating and its chilling effect

L = layering of clothes

D = dry, stay that way

Also eat carbs, hot fluids, avoid dehydration, no alcohol.

Beware of cold, windy, wet days and nights. Hypothermia can occur above freezing temp.

Shivering

A good sign for diagnosing hypothermia. Shivering is a protective body adaptation that can temporarily increase heat production by 500%. If shivering can be voluntarily stopped, hypothermia is mild, if it cannot the hypothermia is becoming more severe.

A cognitive test for hypothermia: count backwards by 8, or 9 from 10.

Assisting a hypothermia patient

Move out of the cold

Remove all wet clothes

Place on and wrap in blankets

Share body heat

Warm beverages

Warm compresses to the trunk, head, groin – but NOT to the extremities

Do Not:

Apply direct heat (hot water, heating pads or lamps)

Warm extremities first

Rub or massage the victim

Give alcohol

Michael Garcia, M.D.