

Tips for Older Adults To Stay Safe in Cold Weather

Changes that come with aging can make it harder for older adults to be aware of their body becoming too cold. This can quickly turn into a dangerous health issue, such as hypothermia or frostbite.

Use the information and tips below to help lower these risks during the colder months and to learn what to do in the case of unsafe exposure to the cold.

Staying Warm When It's Cold Outside

- Check the weather forecast for windy and cold days. A heavy wind can quickly lower your body temperature — try to stay inside or in a warm place.
- If you must go out on windy, cold, or damp days, don't stay outside for very long.
- Let others know when you're planning to spend time outdoors and carry a fully charged mobile phone.
- Keep warm blankets and extra cold-weather clothing in your car.
- Wear a hat, scarf, and gloves or mittens to prevent loss of body heat through your head and hands. Also consider using disposable or rechargeable hand- and foot-warming products.
- Wear warm and loose layers of clothing. The air between the layers helps to keep you warm.
- Wear a waterproof coat or jacket if it's snowy or rainy.
- Change out of damp or wet clothes as soon as possible.



What Is Hypothermia?

Hypothermia is a medical emergency that occurs when the body's core temperature drops below 95°F. It is often caused by exposure to cold temperatures, but it can also occur at cool temperatures (above 40°F) if you become chilled from rain, sweat, or being in cold water. Hypothermia affects the brain and makes it difficult to think clearly, so people may not realize what is happening and that they need help.

What To Look For

Be aware of warning signs and early symptoms:

- Cold feet and hands
- Puffy or swollen face
- Pale skin
- Shivering or shaking
- Slowed or slurred speech
- Feeling sleepy, angry, or confused

Later symptoms of hypothermia can include:

- Stiff and jerky arm and leg movements
- Slow heartbeat or breathing
- Loss of consciousness

What To Do

Hypothermia is a medical emergency. If someone has signs of hypothermia, **call 911 right away.**

After you call 911:

- Help the person move to a warmer place, if possible.
- Offer them a warm drink.
- Wrap them in dry blankets, towels, or coats.
- Don't use a heating pad.
- Don't rub the person's legs or arms.
- Don't try to warm the person in a bath.

What Is Frostbite?

Frostbite is injury to the skin caused by exposure to temperatures below freezing. It can lead to a loss of feeling and color in the affected areas — often, the hands, feet, nose, and ears. Frostbite can permanently damage the body. Because the frozen parts of the body are numb, people may not know they have frostbite.

What To Look For

In the warning stage of frostbite (called frostnip), affected areas of skin may experience:

- Redness
- Pain
- Sensation of pins and needles

If cold exposure continues, frostbitten skin may become:

- Numb
- White or grayish yellow
- Unusually firm or waxy feeling

What To Do

If you notice any signs of frostbite, seek medical care. In addition:

- Protect any exposed skin and get into a warm car or room.
- Avoid walking on frostbitten feet or toes.
- Put the frostbitten area in warm water.
- Use body heat, such as an armpit, to warm the frostbitten area if warm water is not available.
- Don't rub or massage the frostbitten area.
- Don't use a heating pad, heat lamp, or the heat of a stove, fireplace, or radiator for warming.

To learn more about cold weather safety, visit www.nia.nih.gov/cold-safety.