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## What is Hypothermia?

**Hypothermia happens when a person's body temperature drops below 35°C (95°F). Normal body temperature is around 37°C (98.6°F).**

Hypothermia can quickly become life threatening and should be treated as a medical emergency.

It's usually caused by being in a cold environment and can be triggered by a combination of things – such as being outdoors in cold conditions for a long time, living in a poorly heated house or falling into cold water.

### Who's at risk?

People who are particularly at risk are those who are elderly or ill and are unable to move around easily to generate heat.

Babies are also more prone to developing hypothermia because their bodies' ability to regulate their temperature isn't fully developed.

However, anyone who spends long periods outside during the winter without wearing appropriate warm clothing can also be at risk, particularly after drinking large amounts of alcohol.

Read more about the [causes of hypothermia](#).

### Signs of hypothermia

The signs of hypothermia vary depending on how low a person's temperature has dropped. Initial symptoms include shivering, tiredness, fast breathing and cold or pale skin.

As the temperature drops, shivering becomes more violent (although this will stop completely if the hypothermia worsens further), the person is likely to become delirious, struggle to breathe or move and they may lose consciousness.

Babies with hypothermia may look healthy but their skin will feel cold. They may also be limp, unusually quiet and refuse to feed.

Read more about the [symptoms of hypothermia](#).

## **When to get medical help**

You should seek immediate medical help if you suspect someone has hypothermia.

If someone you know has been exposed to the cold and they are distressed, confused, have slow, shallow breathing or they're unconscious, they may have severe hypothermia. In this case, dial 999 immediately to request an ambulance.

## **Helping someone with hypothermia**

While waiting for medical help, it is important to try to prevent further heat loss and gently warm the person. You should:

- Move the person indoors or somewhere warm as soon as possible.
- Once they are somewhere warm, carefully remove any wet clothing and dry the person.
- Wrap them in blankets, towels or coats.

If the person is unconscious, not breathing and you can't detect a pulse in their neck after 60 seconds, [cardio-pulmonary resuscitation \(CPR\)](#) should be given if you know how to do it. Once CPR is started, it should be continued without any breaks until medical assistance arrives.

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## Preventing hypothermia

**There are simple measures you can take to prevent you, your child or elderly relatives getting hypothermia.**

### Staying warm inside

Keep an eye on any elderly or ill neighbours and relatives to ensure that they are keeping their house warm during cold weather. The government offers a [winter fuel allowance](#) for older people living alone who are at risk of getting hypothermia. Keeping windows and internal doors closed will also help to trap heat.

If you have a baby, put a room thermometer in the room where they sleep in order to monitor the temperature. Keep it at 16-20°C (60.8-68°F).

A healthy diet with plenty of fluids, warm drinks and regular meals can help provide energy so your body can generate heat. Avoiding alcohol, caffeine and smoking can also help as they all increase the rate at which the body loses heat.

If you're ill, visit your local pharmacy or GP to ensure you're treated promptly and effectively. If you're taking regular medication, ask whether it affects your body's ability to regulate temperature.

See [keep warm, keep well](#) for more information and advice.

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### Staying warm outside

Make sure you are prepared for cold weather by checking the forecast and weather warnings on the [Met Office website](#).

Wear appropriate warm clothing in cold weather and make sure your children are well wrapped up when outdoors. A significant amount of body heat can be lost through the head, even if the rest of the body is covered up, so you and your children should wear a warm hat.

Multiple thin layers of clothing trap air, which keeps you warm more effectively than one thick layer. Waterproof and windproof clothing gives the best protection outdoors in the sort of weather conditions found in the UK.

Keep active when it's cold, but not to the point where you are sweating. If you exercise outdoors during the winter and you sweat after exercising, make sure that you dry off and put on warm clothes immediately afterwards. Wet clothes lose around 90% of their insulating power

Eating and drinking regularly (but not alcohol and caffeine) and having warm drinks can also help keep you warm outside.

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