

HYPOTHERMIA BASICS

DEFINITION, CAUSES, PREVENTION AND CURE

1. Common cause of death in the mountains.
2. DEFINITION: body temperature drops to a level that is incompatible with life. As it drops, judgment and reasoning are impaired.
3. CAUSE: exposure to cold, wind – usually coupled with damp and inadequate clothing. Leads to too much heat loss from skin surface which cannot be replaced by muscular activity or shivering.
4. Victim has no idea what is happening to him/her.
5. Most cases occur between 35° and 50°F. Can occur at higher temperatures. Damp clothing on a windy day can be DEADLY.
6. Exhaustion prevents the body from defending itself.
7. Body Temperatures – consequences:

98-96°F	Shivering becomes intense – uncontrollable.
95-91°F	Violent shivering, sluggish speech, amnesia.
90-86°F	Strong muscular rigidity.
85-81°F	Irrational, stupor, slow pulse and breathing.
78°F >	Cardiac failure, loss of respiratory control. Cardiac fibrillation - - - - DEATH!!!

THE “UMBLES” – Mumbles, Fumbles, Stumbles, Grumbles.

PREVENTION

1. Wear (bring) layers of clothing. Use them wisely before the cold sets in.
2. Keep hydrated (drink lots of water).
3. Avoid exhaustion.
4. Keep food available and eat small portions (e.g. GORP) periodically throughout the hike.
5. Be weather wise – keep an eye on what’s happening to you, your body, and the weather around you.
6. It is far better and safer to avoid becoming hypothermic in the first place than having to deal with it after it has set in.

CURE

1. Get out of the cold/wind/rain. Consider setting up a tent or look for other shelter.
2. Strip off clothing, put on dry clothes (e.g. warm beanie, gloves, warm socks, layers over rest of the body). Keep these clothes dry.
3. Consume warm drinks, **very slowly** (soup or bouillon, if available – make them for the victim if they cannot). Stay away from sugars for the first 20 to 30 minutes (body functions slow down significantly, so a sugar high could be very dangerous).
4. Get into a sleeping bag.
5. Body to body heat.
6. It may take a bit of time for the victim to come around, but be patient and keep working – it’ll all work out OK, if it hasn’t gotten too far along.
7. Use your judgment – if necessary, get the victim to professional medical treatment.