

Frostbite

For those of us who have to work outdoors or in unheated buildings with limited warm areas during the winter months, frostbite and hypothermia are ever present hazards. Frostbite is the result of ice crystals forming in the fluid and soft tissues of the skin. It is readily distinguishable by a white or grayish-yellow skin tint, and the lack of pain or feeling in the affected skin tissue area. Blisters often appear. The areas of the body primarily affected are the fingers, toes, ears cheeks and nose.

A person who has frostbite once is more apt to get it again than someone who has not had it before. The injured part of the body may become sensitive to cold and must be protected from further frostbite.

To prevent frostbite

Wear several layers of loose-fitting, natural-fiber clothing.

Pay particular attention to protecting the feet, hands, and head areas through the use of wool socks, gloves, and ski mask or other head protection

Consider wearing ear flaps as added protection for the ears, and a face mask in especially windy weather..

Refrain from the consumption of alcohol, because it increases body heat loss:

Whenever frostbite is detected, take the following immediate action:

Protect the affected area from further injury until the patient can be moved indoors

Wrap or cover the patient with blankets or other warming materials.

Submerge the affected area in warm water (100-105 degrees)

Provide the patient with warm fluids—**never alcoholic beverages.**

Obtain medical assistance as quickly as possible.

Never rub the affected area or apply a hot water bottle or use a heating lamp.

To prevent hypothermia, you should:

Maintain a nutritious diet that includes heat-producing foods such as carbohydrates.

Drink plenty of fluids—**but not alcoholic beverages.**

If on medication, question your physician to ensure the medication does not counteract your body heat process.

Wear adequate protective clothing, which includes several layers of natural-fiber, loose-fitting outer garments, plus adequate foot, hand and head protection.

Remain dry. If clothing becomes wet, it should be immediately removed and replaced by dry clothing.

Avoid prolonged cold weather exposure.

Whenever a victim displays hypothermia symptoms:

Move the patient to a warmer environment.

Remove any wet clothing and wrap patient in blankets or other warming materials.

Make the patient rest to conserve heat.

Give warm, sweet fluids—**Not alcoholic beverages.**

Obtain medical assistance as quickly as possible.

