

# Cold Stress Prevention



Cold Stress, or “hypothermia”, can occur any time of the year. Most cases develop in air temperatures between 30 and 50 degrees Fahrenheit. People who are exposed to lower temperatures are at risk for injuries ranging from frostbite to serious loss of body heat, which could result in brain damage or death.

## What you can do to protect yourself:

**Dress warmly, in layers.** Preserving an air space between the body and the outer layer of clothing will help retain body heat. Fabrics such as wool or cotton are preferable because they insulate, but at the same time, allow sweat to evaporate. It is especially important to protect the feet, hands, head and face. These parts of the body are farthest from the heart and are the hardest to keep warm. Almost half your body heat can be lost through the head, so wear those hats!

**Keep dry.** Wetness greatly increases the chance of cold stress. Always have extra clothing available if there’s a chance you could keep wet. Keep your feet dry, they are very susceptible to frostbite.

**Take a break.** Despite popular beliefs, it is not wise to “work, work, work” in cold temperatures. Though you may sweat and feel warmer, becoming fatigued during physical activity decreases your body’s ability to properly retain heat. This causes rapid cooling, which can quickly lead to cold stress. When you take a break, be sure to replace lost fluids and calories by drinking warm, sweet, caffeine-free non-alcoholic drinks and soups.

**Eat right.** A proper diet provides your body with the nutrients it needs to withstand cold stress. A restrictive diet may deprive your body the ability to work well in cold temperatures.

**Don’t work alone.** In cold-stress prone environments, a buddy system should be used. Look out for one another and be alert for symptoms of cold stress.

**Learn what to look out for.** The effects of cold stress may not be apparent to its victim. The first symptoms of hypothermia are uncontrollable shivering and the sensation of cold. The heartbeat slows and may become irregular, and the pulse weakens. As the condition worsens, severe shaking or rigid muscles may be evident. The victim may also have slurred speech, memory lapses, and drowsiness. Cool skin, slow, irregular breathing, and exhaustion occur as the body temperature drops even lower. **This is a serious condition requiring immediate medical attention.**

## **Frostbite Briefing:**

Frostbite can occur without accompanying hypothermia. Frostbite occurs when the fluids around the body’s tissue freeze. The most vulnerable parts of the body are the nose, cheeks, ears, fingers, and toes. Symptoms of frostbite include coldness and tingling in the affected part, followed by numbness; changes in skin color to white or grayish-yellow, initial pain, which subsides as the condition worsens, and possibly blisters. Frostbite can cause irreversible tissue damage and requires immediate medical attention.

**Remember, it doesn’t have to be freezing for cold stress to occur. Take steps to protect yourself!**