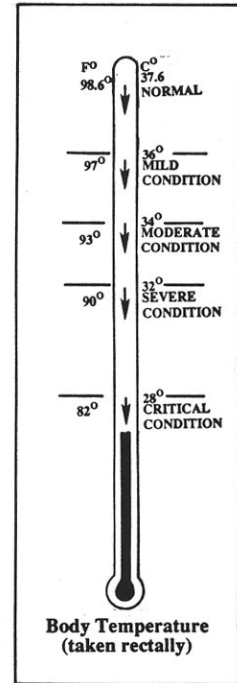




Louisiana State University  
**Agricultural Center**  
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**LOUISIANA  
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## HYPOTHERMIA - THE SILENT KILLER

Hypothermia occurs when a person has been in cold water or cold air long enough for body temperatures to be lowered dangerously. Hypothermia is a potential hazard in Louisiana. A person with hypothermia loses more heat than his body can produce. Danger comes from not knowing the symptoms of hypothermia or the situations in which it can occur.

Hypothermia can begin in wet conditions such as cool drizzling rain. It can be caused by overexertion that brings on sweating. Even high humidity in the air can chill you. Falling in the water and getting soaked will make the onset of hypothermia more likely. An accident that leaves you in the water can take your life in less than an hour even though you do not drown.

Any wind can cool down your body. A long cold boat ride may cause hypothermia. You can lose body heat and be in danger of hypothermia even when the temperature is 40 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Common symptoms include:

- Uncontrollable shivering
- Vague, slow, slurred speech
- Memory lapses, incoherence
- Immobile fumbling hands
- Frequent stumbling
- Drowsiness
- Apparent exhaustion

**Hypothermia Prevention**--Hypothermia can be avoided by being cautious and using common sense. You should always stay dry. If you get wet, get out of the wind and weather, change to dry clothing, build a fire and get warm. Avoid over-exertion which leads to perspiration and fatigue.

Always carry protection from the wind. A lined nylon windbreaker or light raincoat that lets your body breathe will help keep breezes from chilling you. Keep your head warm.

The head, face and neck lose body heat faster than other parts of your body. Proper clothing is important. Clothing made from wool is great for outdoor wear. Wool products hold in body heat even when wet.

In cold wet weather, eat regularly and drink lots of warm liquids. This will help keep you warm. Alcohol consumption should be avoided. Find shelter from windy wet conditions. Always carry a personal survival kit for emergency situations.

**Hypothermia Treatment**--If a person develops hypothermia symptoms then immediate action must be taken to stop heat loss and regain body heat before more serious problems develop. A wet or chilled individual must seek shelter to warm up and dry wet clothing. At a minimum, excess moisture should be wrung from clothing. A fire should be built as soon as possible.

Advance hypothermia is very dangerous. Treatment for these stages should be administered by health professionals. If you discover a person with severe hypothermia, administer the following first-aid while waiting for help.

- Apply CPR if necessary. If victim is breathing, and you can feel a pulse, gently transfer him to a warm place.
- Treat him gently. Do not massage or manipulate extremities.
- Remove or cut away wet clothes.
- Place an unconscious or semi-conscious victim in a level, face-up position.
- Stop further heat loss. For example, put victim in a plastic garbage bag with a hole cut for the head.
- Find a heat source or heat donor. Placing the victim nude in a sleeping bag with another person is a technique that warms the victim gradually. Gently and gradually apply warmed objects wrapped in towels to the groin, chest, neck and head. Rewarming must be slow to avoid a shock to his system that could cause his heart to stop.
- Don't give coffee or alcohol. The unconscious or semi-conscious should be given nothing to eat or drink.
- Keep his temperature even during transport.
- Do not leave the victim alone in case delayed reactions occur.