



COLD STRESS SAFETY



U.S. Navy photo by Mass
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As the cold weather hits, it is important to be prepared so you can stay warm and safe. If hypothermia, frostbite, or other cold stress conditions do occur, quick treatment is critical. Hypothermia occurs when your body temperature is abnormally low after prolonged exposure to cold.¹ Similarly, frostbite is the freezing of body tissues, most commonly the face, ears, fingers, or toes, after continued exposure to cold.¹ What constitutes cold stress varies across different areas of the country; for example, in areas not accustomed to winter weather, near freezing temperatures are a factor for cold stress.¹ Cold stress is more about how people respond to and prepare for winter weather, rather than a set temperature classification.¹ Whenever temperatures fall significantly below normal and wind speed increases, your body loses heat more rapidly and precautions must be taken to avoid serious health problems such as hypothermia.¹

Prevention and Treatment Tips

- **Wear appropriate clothing.**¹ Wear several layers of loose clothing to provide optimum insulation without cutting off blood flow.
- **Protect your face, ears, and extremities.**¹ Wear a hat and boots that are insulated and waterproof.
- **Take breaks.**² Take breaks in a warm room when possible and avoid extended periods of time outside. Remove any wet clothing and allow time for it to dry.
- **Have a safety pack in your car.**³ In case you become stranded in your vehicle during cold weather, make sure to always carry a blanket and extra clothing to stay warm. Also include items such as a flashlight, phone charger, snacks, a battery-powered radio, and water.
- **Hypothermia treatment.**¹ If hypothermia occurs, get medical help immediately. Move the victim to a warm room and remove wet clothing. Warm the center of their body first (chest, neck, head, and groin) and give them a warm, non-alcoholic beverage if they are conscious. If they have no pulse, call 911 and perform CPR.
- **Frostbite treatment.**¹ Get the victim into a warm room immediately. Immerse the affected area in warm (not hot) water or use body heat. Do not use a heating pad, fireplace, or radiator for warming, and do not massage the area as this could cause more damage. Avoid walking on frostbitten feet or toes.

¹ Cold Stress. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/>. Updated December 2014. Accessed July 2015.

² Protecting Yourself from Cold Stress. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - NIOSH. <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-115/pdfs/2010-115.pdf>. Accessed July 2015

³ Winter Storms & Extreme Cold. FEMA. <http://www.ready.gov/winter-weather>. Updated July 2015. Accessed July 2015.

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