

Hypothermia and older adults

January 7 2014, by Kim Calvin

Frigid weather can pose special risks to older adults. The National Institute on Aging (NIA), part of the National Institutes of Health, has some advice for helping older people avoid hypothermia—when the body gets too cold—during cold weather.

Hypothermia is generally defined as having a [core body temperature](#) of 95 degrees Fahrenheit or lower and can occur when the outside environment gets too cold or the body's heat production decreases. Older adults are especially vulnerable to [hypothermia](#) because their bodies' response to cold can be diminished by underlying medical conditions such as diabetes and by use of some medicines, including over-the-counter cold remedies. Hypothermia can develop in [older adults](#) after relatively short exposure to [cold weather](#) or even a small drop in temperature.

Someone may suffer from hypothermia if he or she has been exposed to cool temperatures and shows one or more of the following signs: slowed or slurred speech; sleepiness or confusion; shivering or stiffness in the arms and legs; poor control over body movements; slow reactions, or a weak pulse.

Here are a few tips to help older people avoid hypothermia:

- Make sure your home is warm enough. Set the thermostat to at least 68 to 70 degrees. Even mildly cool homes with temperatures from 60 to 65 degrees can lead to hypothermia in [older people](#).

- To stay warm at home, wear long underwear under your clothes, along with socks and slippers. Use a blanket or afghan to keep your legs and shoulders warm and wear a hat or cap indoors.
- When going outside in the cold, it is important to wear a hat, scarf, and gloves or mittens to prevent loss of body heat through your head and hands. A hat is particularly important because a large portion of [body heat](#) can be lost through the head. Wear several layers of warm loose clothing to help trap warm air between the layers.
- Check with your doctor to see if any prescription or over-the-counter medications you are taking may increase your risk for hypothermia.

More information: Download "Hypothermia: A Cold Weather Hazard" here: www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/hypothermia

Download "Stay Safe in Cold Weather" here:
[www.nia.nih.gov/health/publica ... ay-safe-cold-weather](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/stay-safe-cold-weather)

The factsheet is available in Spanish: [www.nia.nih.gov/espanol/public ... ciones/la-hipotermia](http://www.nia.nih.gov/espanol/publicaciones/la-hipotermia)

Provided by National Institutes of Health

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