

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is avoidable with common sense, training, and proper gear. Hypothermia must be avoided. Proper first aid must be administered to others you find who are hypothermic.

Hypothermia is the lowering of the body's core temperature. Severe hypothermia can slow body functions and result in death. Mild hypothermia can cause permanent damage to the body's ability to regulate its temperature and can affect the mind.

People suffering from Hypothermia sometimes make poor decisions. They think they are OK. They have been known to strip their clothing and leave their tent and sleeping bag for a naked roll in the snow thinking they are burning up.

Cold Shock is the jolt your body experiences when a large area of skin comes in contact with cold water. This "Cold Shock" can cause you to gasp uncontrollably and drown. This is not to be confused with the medical term of being in "shock" from an injury.

Methods of Avoiding Hypothermia:

1. Limit paddling to weather and water temperatures suitable for swimming
2. **Wear appropriate paddle clothing.** (See a separate document to learn about proper paddle sport clothing.)
3. Constantly monitor your comfort level. If you get the slightest bit cooled off it might be time to add more layers, a helmet liner, gloves, etc. If you chill or shiver, stop and fix it immediately. Hypothermia can sneak up on you.
4. Prepare for potential exposure to cold water. Always have a rapid rescue solution. Sea kayaking (deep water) has the greatest potential for extended swims. Deep-water kayakers must be proficient with sea kayak rescue techniques. River kayaking usually provides for a quicker exit from the cold water. Even the best paddle clothing solution is only good for a short swim/exposure. The heat loss must be stopped soon to prevent hypothermia.
5. Learn self-rescue techniques (Eskimo Roll and/or Paddle Float Rescue) and learn to help rescue others (assisted rescues). River rescues involve getting the swimmer out of the cold water and on shore. Sea kayak rescues involve getting the swimmer back in the boat and the cold water out of the boat.

Mild Hypothermia: (Core temperature from normal down to 90 degrees.)

Symptoms:

- Shivering is likely but not required
- Victim refuses to admit a problem – very common
- Makes poor decisions
- Doesn't take care of them self
- Consciousness decreases

Treatment:

- **Stop the heat loss** – dry clothes, sleeping bag, emergency blanket, etc.
- Hydrate – drinking fluids will help the body's thermo regulator
- Avoid alcohol or caffeine – both work to dehydrate
- Food – the body acts as a furnace as it burns carbohydrates. Protein is too slow. Start with carbohydrates or complex carbohydrates to help warm the body. Try simple sugars, PB&J sandwiches. Later add protein.
- Apply light heat such as a candle under tent. – This is mostly to stop the heat loss.
- Do not attempt rapid warming such as submerging in hot water.
- Heavy heat will warm the skin and fool the body's thermo regulator. Warm up needs to be internal. Be gentle.
- Light exercise if victim is up to it. Be gentle!
- Heavy exercise is great if you just began to chill.

Severe Hypothermia: (Core temperature below 90 degrees)

Symptoms:

- Shivering stops - # 1 signal or noticeable difference
- Difficult to walk or stand
- Possible loss of consciousness

Treatment:

- **Stop the heat loss**
- Don't attempt to warm victim.
- Evacuate and transport to hospital for warm up process
- Move gently

WARNING: Warming a severe hypothermic victim too quickly, can cause a toxin dump, arrhythmia and/or death. This must be done at a hospital under close monitoring and medication.

Revised: January 16, 2013 by Chris Collins