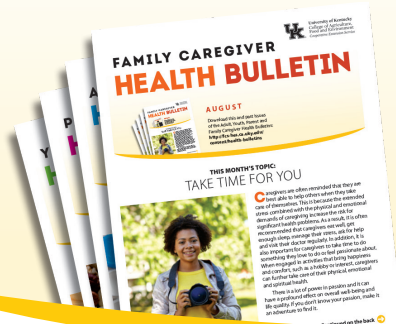




# FAMILY CAREGIVER

# HEALTH BULLETIN



**JANUARY 2022**

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<http://fcs-hes.ca.uky.edu/content/health-bulletins>

## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# WARNING SIGNS OF HYPOTHERMIA



**B**ecause of normal age-related changes in the body and/or various medical conditions, older adults are more susceptible to losing body heat and may have a more difficult time trying to stay warm. Hypothermia is a medical condition that occurs when the body's temperature gets too low (below 95 degrees). When body temperature drops, organs and the nervous system cannot properly function. Various health problems such as heart attacks and trouble with the respiratory system, kidneys, and liver can occur. Hypothermia can also lead to death. While cold weather and cold water are the most common causes of hypothermia, bitter indoor temperatures can also lead to hypothermia, especially among older adults.

Continued on the back



# ***If you suspect hypothermia in yourself or in someone for whom you provide care, call 911 right away.***

## **➔ Continued from page 1**

Hypothermia can be hard to identify because early symptoms begin gradually (Mayo Clinic, 2021). Confusion is also an early symptom. As a result, many people do not even recognize it is happening.

### **Warning signs of hypothermia include:**

- Cold house
- Shivering
- Slurred or slow speech, mumbling
- Lack of coordination or trouble with balance
- Stiff or jerky movement
- Shallow or slow breathing
- Cold feet or hands
- Bright red skin
- Swollen face
- Pale skin
- Feeling lethargic, sleepy, or drowsy
- Acting angry or confused
- Memory loss
- Weak pulse or slow heartbeat
- Loss of consciousness

If you suspect hypothermia in yourself or in someone for whom you provide care, call 911 right away. Then move the person to a warmer place and/or wrap them with blankets, towels, or coats to keep them warm. Lying close and sharing body heat can also be helpful. Warm drinks are appropriate, but you should avoid giving liquids that contain alcohol and caffeine. According to the National Institute on Aging, you should NOT rub a person's arms or legs, put the person in a warm or hot bath, or use a heating pad to warm someone.

The best way to prevent hypothermia is to stay warm in cold weather. The National Institute on Aging recommends taking precautionary steps to decrease the risk of getting hypothermia:

- Set the heat in your house to at least 68 to 70 degrees.
- Dress warmly both inside and outside, including coverings for your feet and head.
- When outdoors, dress in layers to protect you from chilly, damp, and/or windy weather. Be sure



to wear a hat, scarf, and waterproof jacket.

- Avoid staying outdoors for extended periods of time.
- Change out of wet clothes immediately.
- Wear long underwear under pajamas.
- Wear a cap or hat to bed.
- Use a blanket while sitting.
- Add extra covers on the bed when sleeping.
- Watch your alcohol intake as excessive alcohol can cause loss of body heat.
- Talk to family, friends, or a neighbor every day during cold weather.
- Stay with family or friends during power outages.
- Use space heaters with caution as they can be fire hazards and cause carbon monoxide poisoning.

### **REFERENCES**

- Mayo Clinic. (2021) Hypothermia. Retrieved November 2021 from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hypothermia/symptoms-causes/syc-20352682>
- National Institute on Aging. (2018). Cold Weather Safety For Older Adults. Retrieved November 2021 from <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/cold-weather-safety-older-adults>

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HEALTH BULLETIN**

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