

Hypothermia Tips

Written by Dr. Niru Prasad

The chill winds of winter pose a variety of health concerns including one that is particularly serious - - hypothermia.

Niru Prasad, M.D. on staff at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital's department of ambulatory pediatrics, explains that hypothermia occurs when a person's core body temperature falls well below normal as a result of prolonged exposure to cold. "Symptoms of moderate hypothermia are mental confusion, clumsiness and loss of interest in activity," says Dr. Prasad, noting that treatment should be immediate. "Get the victim out of the cold and into a warm environment, replace wet clothes, serve warm liquids and apply hot water bottles of heat pads."

Dr. Prasad states that in cases of severe hypothermia, loss of the shivering response (the body's way of speeding metabolism and generating heat) and loss of consciousness may result. She cautions against trying to warm the victim with active measures and advises that the victim be covered gently with blankets, removed from the cold environment and taken to the hospital for immediate medical attention.

To avoid hypothermia, take the following precautions:

Eat a well balanced diet and take a high calorie snack if you expect to be out in the cold for a long period.

Avoid alcohol, it causes your body to lose heat faster.

Dress in light, loose and layered clothing that will trap layers of air and provide extra insulation.

Know the effects of any medication you are taking. Some affect the body's

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response to outside temperature changes.