

CONQUER THE COLD WEATHER — A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR PATIENTS

WHAT'S WRONG

PINPOINT THE CAUSE

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

PLAN OF ACTION

PREVENTION IS THE BEST MEDICINE

Hypothermia — don't let this wet blanket get you all shook up

- Sets in when heat is lost faster than it can be produced by the body
- A body temperature of under 35°C signals hypothermia

- Early symptoms:**
- Shivering
 - Cold, pale or blue-grey skin
 - Poor judgment
 - Mild unsteadiness while walking
 - Slurred speech
 - Numb hands
- Late symptoms:**
- Body core is cold to the touch
 - Rigid muscles
 - Slowed pulse
 - Shallow and slowed breathing
 - Weakness or drowsiness
 - Confusion
 - Loss of consciousness
 - Shivering

- Get out of the cold or wet immediately
- Use warm blankets and hot water bottles to warm up
- Drink warm fluids that don't contain caffeine or alcohol
- Moderate to severe hypothermia is usually treated in hospital using warmed intravenous fluids, humidified oxygen and other body-warming interventions

- As with frostbite, it's important to wear proper protective gear
- Keeping dry during cold weather is key
- Avoid activities that make you sweat a lot when it's very cold outside
- Elderly folks should keep their homes heated to 21°C

Frostbite — when Jack Frost takes a nip, bite back

- Frostbite hits when skin temperature drops below -2° C
- Most cases happen while people are outdoors
- Below freezing temperature, wind chill factor, humidity in the air and high altitudes are all contributing factors

- Mild frostbite (or frostnip): a whitening of the skin, the affected area may appear red for several hours
- Severe frostbite: skin may appear waxy with white, grey-yellow or grey-blue tones
- Swelling, itching, burning and pain set in as the area thaws

- Get out of the cold and warm up indoors
- Remove all wet clothing
- Keep the affected area clean
- Leave blisters intact
- Don't rub the area with snow
- Avoid using dry heat — like a lamp or radiator
- Building up body temperature is important and best accomplished by immersing the area in warm water

- Proper clothing is the key. Wear winter gear that insulates from the cold, this keeps perspiration away from the skin and protects against wind, rain and snow
- Cover up any areas of exposed skin
- Protect hands and feet
- Avoid staying outside for too long when it's below -25°C

Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning — you might not see or smell this insidious threat coming

- CO leaking into the home or a car while it's idling
- gas released from a fireplace or fuel-burning appliance
- CO is toxic when levels are higher than 50ppm (parts per million) with continuous exposure over an eight-hour period

- Low levels of CO:**
- Shortness of breath
 - Mild nausea and headache
 - Sore eyes
 - Runny nose
- Moderate levels of CO:**
- Headaches
 - Drowsiness and vomiting
 - Dizziness
 - Nausea
- High levels of CO (fatal):**
- Unconsciousness
 - Brain damage
 - Death

- Get some fresh air immediately
- Open all windows and doors, and turn off any combustion appliances
- Get to the emergency room as quickly as possible

- Install a CO detector at home
- Never idle the car in the garage
- Avoid using a gas oven to heat your home
- Never sleep in a room heated by a gas or kerosene space heater that does not have proper venting

Seasonal Affective Disorder — when your sunny disposition checks out every winter, don't take it lightly

- No cause has been determined yet but it's believed to be triggered by an increase in melatonin production

- Recurring symptoms of depression — excessive eating and sleeping — during the fall or winter months for two consecutive years
- Full remission from depression during spring and summer
- Cravings for sugary and/or starchy foods
- Weight gain
- Constant fatigue and oversleeping

- Light therapy administered by a 10,000-lux light box with daily sessions of 10 to 15 minutes
- Prescription antidepressants

- There are no preventative measures for the disorder but some studies suggest that getting outside, for even 15 minutes a day, could improve symptoms