

The Comfort of Home®

Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

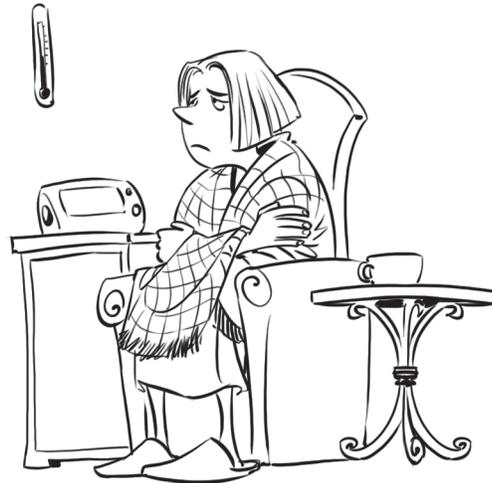
Why Am I So Cold? Hypothermia

One of the common changes people notice while they are aging is that they are more sensitive to cold temperatures.

The normal workings that keep our body warm may be affected by poor health and a weak immune system. Sometimes, hormonal changes, especially in women, can lead to feeling cold all the time. *Low estrogen* levels associated with menopause or *low thyroid hormone* levels are some examples of changes that commonly occur in women.

Your doctor may try to find out if your feeling cold all the time may be a symptom of a medical problem such as high blood pressure or diabetes. *Low thyroid* activity and *high cholesterol* can also affect your body's ability to regulate your temperature. Some drugs may also contribute to these symptoms. Medications used to treat *high blood pressure* and *heart disease*, such as beta blockers and calcium channel blockers, can affect blood vessels and blood circulation, which can lead to heat loss and hypothermia. *Hypothermia* is a condition characterized by a dangerously low body temperature.

However, even healthy people who are growing older may also experience feeling cold. This is because the blood vessels, which help conserve body heat, are not as elastic as they used to be,



and their responses to changes in temperature become slower. Furthermore, different people may react to cold temperature in various ways, depending on their individual sensitivities. Feeling cold does not necessarily mean that you are sick or that you need treatment. Sometimes, the best thing to do is to just put on a warm sweater or a cozy pair of socks.

If you have been feeling cold for some time, and bundling up does not seem to help, ask yourself if the unusual feeling is related to other symptoms. For example, have you noticed any changes in weight or any weakness? Do you feel cold all over or is it just your hands and feet? Help your doctor evaluate your symptoms by discussing them with him or her.

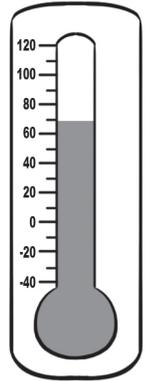
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Avoiding Hypothermia

During winter, anyone who wanders outdoors is at risk of hypothermia, a condition when the body temperature falls to below 95° F.

To prevent hypothermia:

- ⊗ Keep the temperature at home at least 65° F or 70° F if the senior is ill. A frail, older adult in a 60-degree house can develop mild hypothermia overnight.
- ⊗ Wear warm clothes, including wool leg warmers for the arms and legs for added warmth.
- ⊗ Use warm blankets in bed.
- ⊗ Wear a knit hat indoors and a warm hat outside to avoid losing heat.
- ⊗ Eat a balanced diet.
- ⊗ Keep warm by moving and walking around the house and lifting and stretching the arms and legs.



If Hypothermia is Present

Signs of hypothermia include shivering, cold pale skin, slow breathing, slow pulses, weakness, drowsiness, confusion, and impaired judgment.

If these signs are present:

- * Wrap the elderly person in blankets.
- * Give him warm fluids. Do not give alcohol.
- * Increase the room temperature.
- * Call the doctor.
- * Do *not* rub the person's skin.
- * Avoid rapid re-warming. Apply *warm* hot water bottles wrapped in towels on the chest and abdomen.
- * Watch out for signs of a heart attack (chest pain, shortness of breath, pain in the jaw, pale skin, sweating, and nausea). Call 911 immediately if these symptoms are present.

Tips to Keep a Cozy House

- ★ **Allow warm sunlight** to get in the house during the day by keeping curtains open, but close them at night to have an added layer of insulation against the cold.
 - ★ To **weatherproof the house**, install storm windows, weather strip door cracks, and add insulation.
 - ★ **Close off rooms** that are not in use.
 - ★ Move the bed and favorite chair to the warmest spot in the room and away from drafty windows.
 - ★ **Dress warmly** even while you are inside the house.
- Remember, avoid dehydration by drinking enough fluids.



Taking Care of Yourself— **Medical Problems that Make You Feel Cold**

Aside from aging, there are a few medical reasons that can make you feel unusually cold. You may—

- ✓ Have low thyroid function, hypothyroidism or be anemic. Your doctor will recommend some blood tests to find out if you have these problems.
- ✓ Be underweight, with too little fat to insulate your body.
- ✓ Have too little muscle. Muscles can generate heat and warm you up, so try to build more muscle by doing some strength training exercises.
- ✓ Be stressed out, which causes your blood vessels to constrict. Try some relaxation techniques to improve your blood circulation.

Wear clothes in layers and drink hot liquids such as ginger tea. If you like foods spiced with ginger or red pepper, you can enjoy a meal and keep warm, too. Finally, use breathing techniques from yoga to help relax your body and improve your circulation.

Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

National Energy Assistance Referral Hotline (NEAR) 1-866-674-6327 (toll-free)
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/liheap

If you have a limited income, you may qualify for help paying your heating bill. The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps keep families safe and healthy through initiatives that assist families with energy costs. Your local Area Agency on Aging, senior center, or community action agency may have information on these programs.

Live Life Laughing!

My doctor told me to avoid unnecessary stress, so I didn't open his bill.



Inspiration

I suggest you develop courage the same way you develop a muscle. You develop a muscle by doing small things first.

~Maya Angelou

Don't Fall – Be Safe

Ice and snow is a serious hazard for elderly people. When walking outdoors, wear proper clothing (including hats, scarfs, gloves, sweaters and coats). Use rubber-soled shoes. Canes or walkers *must* have new treads.

The Comfort of Home[®]

Our Purpose

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

Ordering Info

From the publishers of
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SAFETY TIPS—Fireplaces and Space Heaters

Winter is the time when fireplaces and space heaters are used more often. To keep warm and safe during winter:

- ★ Install extra smoke detectors near heating sources and make sure you check their batteries twice a year.
- ★ Keep space heaters away from curtains and upholstered chairs. Avoid using extension cords with your space heaters or keeping electrical cords under the carpets.
- ★ Make sure all fuel-burning vented equipment is vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. CO (carbon monoxide) is created when fuels burn incompletely. CO poisoning can cause illness and even death. Make sure the venting for exhaust is kept clear and unobstructed. This includes removal of snow and ice around the outlet to the outside.
- ★ Keep the furnace filters clean.
- ★ Open the fireplace flue before lighting a fire. Close it when not in use to prevent cold air from blowing in.
- ★ Keep a fire extinguisher in the house and know how to use it.
- ★ Have a disaster kit ready for winter storms. Kits should include enough food and water for several days, medications, a radio, flashlight, extra batteries, and first-aid essentials.

NEXT ISSUE... UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS - DON'T GET OR PASS GERMS