

First Responders by Doug Brown

We are hoping to have a training session in October but need more volunteers. Please contact either of the two people mentioned at the end of this article for more information.

Part 2- Hypothermia

As tissues cool, their cells don't work properly: The brain and nerves work more slowly, muscles contract with more difficulty and may cramp more easily, and the heart becomes prone to irregular beats.

As core temperature drops, the body will divert warm blood into the core of the body (the head and trunk), allowing the arms and legs (extremities) to become even colder.

Symptoms of Hypothermia:

Signs that can be observed by others:

- Slowing of pace, drowsiness, fatigue
- Stumbling
- Thickness of speech
- Amnesia
- Irrationality, poor judgment
- Hallucinations
- Loss of perceptual contact with environment
- Blueness of skin (cyanosis)
- Dilation (enlargement) of pupils
- Decreased heart and respiration rate
- Stupor

Signs that can be felt or noticed by victim:

- Fatigue, drowsiness, exhaustion, unwillingness to go on
- Feeling of deep cold or numbness
- Poor coordination
- Stumbling

Victim needs IMMEDIATE help if the following are present:

- Poor articulation of words
- Disorientation
- Decrease in shivering followed by rigidity of muscles
- Cyanosis (blueness of skin)
- Slowness of pulse, irregular or weak pulse

Treatment:

- Dry the patient and cover with blankets.
- Shelter the patient from wind and water.

- Provide heat to the neck, underarms, and groin. Heat only the trunk initially to avoid core temperature after-drop. After-drop occurs in this manner: Extremities cool faster than the trunk. If you re-warm the extremities, their colder blood will re-enter the circulation and actually worsen hypothermia temporarily.
- Keep the patient lying down.
- Administer warm fluids only after the patient stops shivering (loss of the shivering reflex signifies significant hypothermia).
- Avoid moving/jarring the patient suddenly because this may trigger an abnormal heart rhythm.
- CPR may be necessary. Resuscitation should not be stopped until the person's body temperature is at least 95°F/35°C (never give up: one reported patient recovered in a morgue). All temperatures indicated are rectal measures, which give a closer indication of core temperature. If the patient is cooperative, you may take temperature by mouth or other method.

The essentials to prepare for and to prevent Hypothermia are:

1. Know the enemies - Cold, Wind, and Wetness. Recognize their insidious power. Recognize your personal strength and the strength of those with you.
2. Prepare in advance for the worst weather. Wear non-cotton clothing. Carry or wear complete body protection. Use it before you get cold.
3. Plan to refuel the body. To combat cold you must move muscles to produce heat. Sugary foods and nibble foods are quickly converted to energy. Plan to carry extra food.
4. Always carry a plastic emergency shelter. A small tarp or a large leaf bag can shelter the body from wind and rain. Such emergency gear is not very big and can be a lifesaver on a wet, windy ridge when you are storm bound.
5. Make camp early in a storm. Cold has such a deteriorating effect on the body you must make camp while you still have the energy reserves to pick the best possible site. Remember, the exhausted persons caught in extreme weather may die before a shelter can be constructed. Putting up tents and tarps takes time and energy.
6. Keep moving since moving muscles produce body heat, it is essential that you manage some movement during the cold emergency. Avoid violent motions. You may cause more heat loss through your clothing as well as more energy loss. The best exercise is isometric muscle contraction.

We need new first responders. Come out to our practices and see what we do. We meet every second Wednesday at Sorrento Fire Hall #2 across from Shuswap Lake Estates Golf Course. Meetings start at 7PM (rain or shine), October meetings are on the 14th and 28th. There is no cost except your time. We have a new course for responders starting in October. All training is done in house at no cost to the students. For more information call Sherri at 250.675.2420 or Doug at 250.675.3920