

BACKCOUNTRY SNOWSHOEING AND SKIING FUNDAMENTALS

CONDITIONS YOU MAY ENCOUNTER AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM

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MOST COMMON MEDICAL CONDITIONS

HYPOTHERMIA:

This condition results from the body core temperature dropping to 95 degrees or less.

It is caused by wet clothing, wind exposure, dehydration and exhaustion.

SYMPTOMS:

1. Shivering (early stage), fumbling, dulled mental functions, behavior changes, loss of coordination. If a person suddenly appears clumsy, is slurring their words, could be early sign of hypothermia.
2. Next Stage: Shivering ceases and the person becomes more disoriented.
3. Progressive loss of mental function, muscle tends to stiffen, shows confusion, stupor and eventually loses consciousness.

TREATMENT:

1. For mild cases: get person out of the elements, give fluids and re-warm using clothing and direct body contact.
2. For more severe cases: Warm the large blood vessels in legs, arms, chest with bottles of warm water. Be careful moving these folks—it can precipitate a cardiac arrest. Don't offer fluids! Try to evacuate ASAP with professional assist from SAR.

Early detection is key!

FROST BITE/FROST NIP:

Frost Nip: Occurs usually on the fingers, toes and tips of nose and ears. In this condition, the affected body part appears pale and cold, but tissue is pliable. Treatment consists of gradually warming the body part by gentle rubbing, heat application followed by covering the affected area to keep warm. Usually no lasting effect.

Frost Bite (more severe version of frost nip): In frost bite, the tissue starts to die because the blood flow to the area has ceased. Tissue appears hardened and can be very red. Tissue will eventually turn black and may slough off. Treatment for this needs to be done in a medical facility. Do not try to re-warm the tissue or rub it. Cover and evacuate ASAP. This condition is common on climbers at very high altitudes in very cold conditions. Can lose an extremity if condition isn't treated relatively quickly.

ALTITUDE SICKNESS:

This condition can exist any time of year at higher altitudes, usually over 7000 ft. Many people experience altitude sickness when they come from lower altitudes to mountainous settings. However, it can happen to those of us who live in higher altitudes as well. It's a function of the state of the body at the time, amount of hydration, proclivity to retain fluids, other predisposing conditions.

Symptoms usually include headache, loss of appetite and nausea. Often goes away after a few days of rest at altitude. Sometimes can progress to two more serious conditions HAPE & HACE.

HAPE: High Altitude Pulmonary Edema: Fluids build up in body and enter your lungs.

HACE: High Altitude Cerebral Edema: Fluid build up goes in to the brain cavity, putting pressure on the brain.

Both of these conditions are very serious and the individual MUST be taken to a lower altitude immediately and evacuated to a medical facility for treatment.