

HYPOTHERMIA

Managing hypothermia (cold-induced condition)

Signs & symptoms

Early warning signs may include:

- feeling cold
- shivering
- clumsiness and slurred speech
- apathy and irrational behaviour.

As body temperature drops:

- shivering usually ceases
- pulse may be difficult to find
- heart rate may slow
- level of consciousness continues to decline.

At around 30°C body temperature:

- unconsciousness is likely
- heart rhythm is likely to change.

As the body temperature falls further the heart may arrest, resulting in death.

WARNING

Call triple zero (000) for an ambulance if:

- level of consciousness declines,
- shivering stops, or
- pulse is difficult to find.

Management

1. **Follow DRSABCD.**
2. **Remove the patient to a warm, dry place.**
3. **Protect the patient and yourself**
 - from wind, rain, sleet, cold, wet ground.
4. **Handle the patient as gently as possible**
 - and avoid excess activity or movement.
5. **Keep the patient in a horizontal position.**
6. **Remove wet clothing.**
7. **Warm the patient:**
 - place between blankets, in a sleeping bag, or wrap in a thermal/space blanket or similar, and cover the head to maintain body heat.
 - hot water bottles, heat packs may be applied to the patient's neck, armpits and groin.
8. **Give patient warm drinks if conscious**
 - NOT alcohol.
9. **Provide warmth to the patient:**
 - aim to stabilise core temperature rather than attempt rapid rewarming
 - DO NOT use radiant heat such as fire or electric heaters
 - DO NOT rub affected areas.

In an emergency, call triple zero (000) for an ambulance

For more information on St John first aid training and kits, visit www.stjohn.org.au or freecall 1300 360 455