

HYPOTHERMIA

Symptoms

Insidious – feeling cold, shivering – listlessness – slowness – weakness – fumbling irrational behaviour – confusion – slurring of speech – making little attempt to help themselves.

The victim will collapse into a coma unless rapid rewarming of the body core takes place.

Treatment

Do prevent further heat loss; if you have them, use man size survival bags or silver space blanket

Do make them comfortable lying down, legs elevated to increase blood flow to the heart, and cover with light warm blankets. If they have been sailing, and have been in the water for a short time, get them into the showers (warm not hot) with their wet suit still on them. After they have sufficiently warmed up carry on with above. You must prevent them getting chilled when they are changing from a wet suit and into their going home clothes.

Do beware of breathing difficulties, unconsciousness and heart arrest if they are deeply hypothermic. If they are unconscious, it is important that the victim is carried in a **prone** position, from where they are found, to a place of safety. Hospital care is essential for any of these but give first aid immediately, as above.

and above all

Do observe the Don'ts

Don't “swim about to keep warm” in cold water – lie still to conserve heat.

Don't increase heat loss from body surface by rubbing limbs.

Don't give hot drinks – will draw blood (and so heat) from “core” and may burn the mouth.

Don't give direct heat (hot water bottle or gas fire) – again will increase surface circulation and therefore heat loss.

Don't give alcohol or other stimulants – will draw blood to surface, and could cause heart failure.

Don't smother victim with heavy blankets – he/she is already struggling to breathe and requires warmth not weight.

Finally, please

Don't be an exposure victim yourself through neglecting to take the obvious preventative precautions i.e. protective clothing, woollens or a wet suit, water/wind proof clothing and warm jerseys.