What is Hypothermia?

Hypothermia means “low temperature”. When your body is exposed to cold temperature, it tries to protect itself by keeping a normal body temperature of 98.6°F. It tries to reduce heat loss by shivering and moving blood from your arms and legs to the core of your body—head, chest and abdomen.

Stages of Hypothermia

Mild Hypothermia
(Core body temperature of 98.6°— 93.2°F)
Symptoms: Shivering; altered judgment; numbness; clumsiness; loss of dexterity; pain from cold; and fast breathing.

Moderate Hypothermia
(Core body temperature of 93.2°—86°F)
Symptoms: Semiconscious to unconscious; shivering reduced or absent; lips are blue; slurred speech; rigid muscles; appears drunk; slow breathing; and feeling of warmth can occur.

Severe Hypothermia
(Core body temperature below 86°F)
Symptoms: Coma; heart stops; and clinical death.

Visit these websites for more water safety and hypothermia prevention information.

East Pierce Fire & Rescue
www.eastpiercefire.org

Washington State Drowning Prevention Coalition
www.drowning-prevention.org

Children’s Hospital & Regional Medical Center
www.seattlechildrens.org

Hypothermia Prevention, Recognition and Treatment
www.hypothermia.org

Boat Washington
www.boatwashington.org

Boat U.S. Foundation
www.boatus.com

Boat Safe
www.boatsafe.com

Headquarters Station
18421 Old Buckley Hwy
Bonney Lake, WA 98391
Phone: 253-863-1800
Fax: 253-863-1848
Email: epfr@eastpiercefire.org

Hypothermia

In Our Lakes and Rivers

Even in Summer!

Waters in Western Washington

Most of the lakes and rivers in Western Washington are glacial fed making for a very chilly average water temperature of 53°F year round—brrrrr! Despite the cold water, Washington waters are a magnet for open water recreation—including swimming.

Who's At Risk for Hypothermia While Swimming?

EVERYONE! But especially...

- Elderly
- Children
- People with lower body fat
- Males (generally cool faster than females)

Your body loses heat 30 times faster in water. Surprisingly, water under 80°F poses a risk of hypothermia. The colder the water, the quicker hypothermia will occur.

Common Misconceptions

Vigorous swimming will help keep my body warm when swimming in cold water.

FACT: Swimming in cold water will not keep you warm. Even though you feel warmer because blood rushes to the skin, you actually lose more heat by swimming.

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You can't get hypothermia while swimming when it is hot outside.

FACT: Even when it's hot outside, the water may be cold enough to cause hypothermia.

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I don't have to worry about hypothermia because I'm athletic and fit—I'm a starter on the varsity basketball team!

FACT: People with low body fat (especially males) have a higher risk of hypothermia. Lean bodies cool faster in the water. Even the strongest swimmers will get hypothermia.

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Alcohol and drugs don't have an affect on hypothermia.

FACT: Alcohol and drugs can give you a false sense of warmth because it opens blood vessels next to the skin. This can cause the body to lose heat faster.

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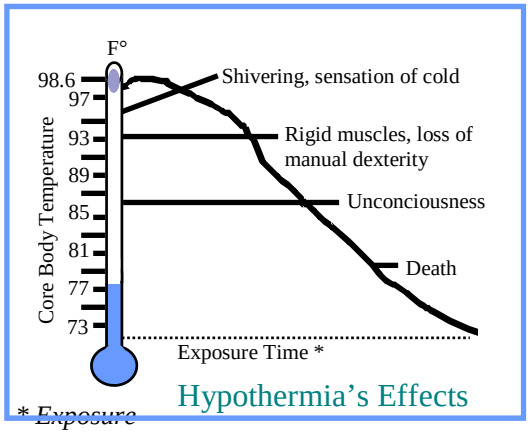
I can swim just as far in a lake or river as I can in a pool.

FACT: People underestimate the coldness of water and its affect on their swimming ability.

50/50/50 Rule
An "average" adult has a 50% chance of surviving a 50 yard swim in 50°F water.

By choosing to swim in colder water you reduce your survival time. Distance can be deceiving in the water—shore may be farther than it appears.



Hypothermia's Effects

* *Exposure time will depend on many variables such as body mass, water temperature, age, gender, alcohol consumption and dehydration.*

Protect Yourself

- Wear a life vest!
- Look for subtle signs:
  - shivering
  - altered judgment
  - blueness of fingers, toes or lips

  If you have any of these signs, stay out of the water until warmed.
- Equip yourself with lifesaving skills:
  - learn how to swim
  - learn C.P.R.
  - know what to do when in trouble