

Want to Stay Warm in Winter? Think COLD

Winter in many places means ice skating, sledding and snowball fights. But unless someone is prepared, outdoor fun can also mean frostbite and hypothermia. Today we talk about how to stay warm, dry and safe.

Frostbite is damage that happens when skin is exposed to extreme cold for too long. It mainly happens on the hands, feet, nose and ears.

People with minor cases of frostbite that affect only the skin may not suffer any permanent damage. But if deeper tissue is affected, a person is likely to feel pain every time the area gets cold.

If blood vessels are damaged, people can suffer an infection, gangrene. Sometimes, doctors have to remove frostbitten areas like fingers and toes.

Hypothermia happens when the body cannot produce as much heat as it loses. The condition comes on slowly. Signs include uncontrollable shaking, unusually slow breathing and difficulty thinking clearly. If not treated, hypothermia can be deadly. The best way to avoid cold-related injuries is to be prepared for the outdoors. Here is a simple way to remember four basic steps to staying warm. Think of COLD -- C.O.L.D.

The C stands for cover. Wear a hat and scarf to keep heat from escaping through the head, neck and ears. And wear mittens instead of gloves. Gloves may not keep hands as warm because they separate the fingers.

The O stands for overexertion. Avoid activities that will make you sweaty. Wet clothes and cold weather are a bad mix.

L is for layers. Wearing loose, lightweight clothes, one layer on top of another, is better than a single heavy layer of clothing. Also, make sure outerwear is made of water resistant and tightly knit material.

Can you guess what the D in COLD stands for? D is for dry. In other words, stay as dry as possible. Pay attention to the places where snow can enter, like the tops of boots, the necks of coats and the wrist areas of mittens.

And a couple of other things to keep in mind, one for children and the other for adults. Eating snow might be fun but it lowers the body's temperature. And drinking alcohol might make a person feel warm, but what it really does is weaken the body's ability to hold heat.

Next week, experts talk about what to do, and not to do, to help someone injured by extreme cold. And that's the VOA Special English Report, written by Caty Weaver.