

What can I do to avoid or reduce the problems caused by hypothermia?

- Read the weather forecast – is this run/ race wise in these conditions? It is your decision to enter a race, not that of the Race Organiser.
- Do not attempt a route beyond your physical and technical ability.
- Carry appropriate spare clothing. Rule 9 kit is minimal, and won't necessarily protect you from hypothermia.
- Carry sweet food, and eat some of it before it's too late.
- Carry a drink to avoid dehydration.
- Know the route and know the area.
- Plan routes you can use to get you off the hill safely and quickly - if necessary.
- Keep an eye on your fellow runners, and be prepared to stop and help if necessary.
- Know how to summon help - via a marshal, or by phone.
- Know any emergency numbers for contacting the Race Organiser.

Getting help

- Summon help by using your whistle to give the emergency signal – six blasts repeated every minute. Ignore any three blast replies – keep blowing the whistle until help arrives.
- Know your position as accurately as possible, and relay this along with your race number either directly to a marshal,

or via another runner (in which case, write it down, if you can – include your phone number, if you have one).

- Remember a text may get through when a call won't, and it will keep trying after someone loses consciousness.

But, if you do have to summon a Mountain Rescue Team yourself ...

- Dial 112 (preferably) or 999 if that doesn't work.
- Ask for Police, then ask the Police for Mountain Rescue.
- Tell them where you are, preferably with a full grid reference including the letters – the operator may be miles away!
- Tell them how many casualties and the problems (injuries, hypothermia etc).
- Let them know the numbers of any other phones in your party.
- Keep your phone switched on and stay by it.

To learn more about hypothermia, see Ian Winterburn's article in the 2012 Summer edition of The Fellrunner, also on Ian's website: everythingoutdoors.co.uk (under Resources)



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Hypothermia

How to avoid it – and what to do if you get it

COVER: Harsh conditions at The Edale Skyline, 2007 PHOTO: ADAM BRIDGEN



What is hypothermia?

Hypothermia is the medical term for the condition caused by the cooling of the human body. Unless action is taken, this condition can progress from mild to severe hypothermia, and, eventually, to death.

The body's core temperature is normally approximately 37°C. Mild hypothermia is experienced when the core temperature falls to somewhere in the range 34-35°C. Severe hypothermia is experienced when the core temperature falls below 33°C.

Unchecked, this condition is fatal.

Why is hypothermia a problem for fell runners?

Active muscles create heat, and a runner generates a great deal of heat while actually running. A runner can often generate such an excess of heat that extremities stay quite warm even in cold weather.

But, if running cannot be continued because of injury or tiredness, and, if the weather is cold and windy and/or wet, the runner will lose heat rapidly. Even on a mild day a tired, wet runner can get hypothermia.

And, if the runner is low on blood sugar, as may well be the case in some longer events, the runner's body may not have sufficient energy to stop this cooling process.

The cooling of the core of the body gives rise to symptoms which include a progressive reduction in the ability to take decisions and actions which might help the situation, and a progressive reduction in consciousness.

The speed of this progressive deterioration can be very quick – which is why it is essential that any missing or affected runners are known about as soon as possible.

It's better to act sooner rather than later.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms represent a progressive deterioration as the body's core temperature decreases.

This list is only a representation of what may happen, and in what order. Some symptoms may not occur, and the order can be different.

Mild hypothermia

- Shivering
- Cold, pale skin, blue lips and pale, white hands and feet
- Lethargic

Moderate hypothermia

- Violent shivering.
- Slurs words and lacks co-ordination. Beware the 'Umbles:- mumbles, fumbles, stumbles, grumbles.
- Confused
- Change of personality
- Difficulty with easy tasks
- Odd behaviour (e.g. removes clothing)

Severe hypothermia

- Shivering stops
- Cold, pale skin, blue lips

- Unconscious, unresponsive
- Rigid muscles
- Signs of life (breathing, pulse) may seem absent

What needs to be done for/by a runner suffering from hypothermia?

General principles:-

- Get help – use your whistle!
- Eat sweet food, drink warm drinks – but not coffee or alcohol.
- Don't feed food to unconscious casualties!
- Get dressed/insulated.
- Change wet clothes for dry if at all possible.
- Get off the hill and seek shelter.
- Notify the Race Organiser or a marshal.
- Try to stay awake.
- Most importantly, do not put your self at risk to save another (one casualty is better than two).

What is actually possible depends upon the state of the casualty.

Notification/getting help is essential, as is insulation from the cold.

Do not try to evacuate any unconscious or partly conscious casualty yourself. Try to keep the casualty sheltered and as warm as possible, and wait for a rescue team.