

Danger: Hypothermia

Stanislaus National Forest

ROG 16-93; 02/05



There's beauty in the Forest—danger, too. Some of the danger is obvious, some not so obvious. Hypothermia is perhaps one of the more dangerous things you may encounter. It often arrives without warning. It doesn't show up at a particular elevation or activity schedule. Weather conditions are a better indicator, but hypothermia can and does occur at temperatures well above freezing. Anyone who becomes dehydrated or fatigued in wet and windy conditions is a potential victim. Fog and storms are frequent in the mountains all season—they increase the risk of hypothermia.



Hypothermia is the rapid and progressive mental and physical collapse that accompanies chilling of the body's inner core. It is caused by exposure to cold and is intensified by wetness, wind and exhaustion.

Once the body temperature falls below 90 degrees Fahrenheit, heat is lost faster than the body can generate it. Two symptoms indicate this state—the victim either begins to exercise in an attempt to stay warm or starts to shiver in an effort to preserve normal temperature in the vital organs. Either of these responses will further deplete the body's energy reserves.

If the exposure is allowed to continue, the body quickly becomes exhausted and the brain is severely affected. The victim is aware of neither loss of judgment and reasoning power nor the lowering of his body temperature and loss of hand control. Without immediate treatment, the victim will continue a physical and mental slide resulting in stupor, collapse and death.

Undetected and untreated, hypothermia can be fatal in a matter of hours. The best defense against hypothermia is to avoid excessive chilling by being aware and well prepared.

Stay Dry

When clothing is wet, it loses approximately 90% of its insulating value and drains heat from the body. Wool, cotton and down have difficulty retaining most insulating value when wet. Newer synthetics and garment fills, such

as Gortex, Polarguard, Hollofil, Thinsulate and Polar Fleece retain their insulating value when wet and dry much faster than wool. They also repel water and moisture in lieu of absorbing them as natural fibers do.

Be Aware Of Wind Factor

Even a slight breeze carries heat away from the body—and forces cold air under, as well as through, clothing. Wind intensifies cold by evaporating moisture from the skin surface.



Use Proper Clothing

Wear raingear when necessary. Put it on before getting wet. Hats and scarves should be worn for protection and to help retain body heat, since 90% of body heat loss occurs from head and neck areas.



If staying warm and dry are not possible under existing conditions and the initial symptoms of hypothermia (shivering, poor coordination and fatigue) are detected, action must be taken to terminate exposure. Immediate treatment includes stopping the heat loss and restoring normal body temperature. Get out of the wind and rain.



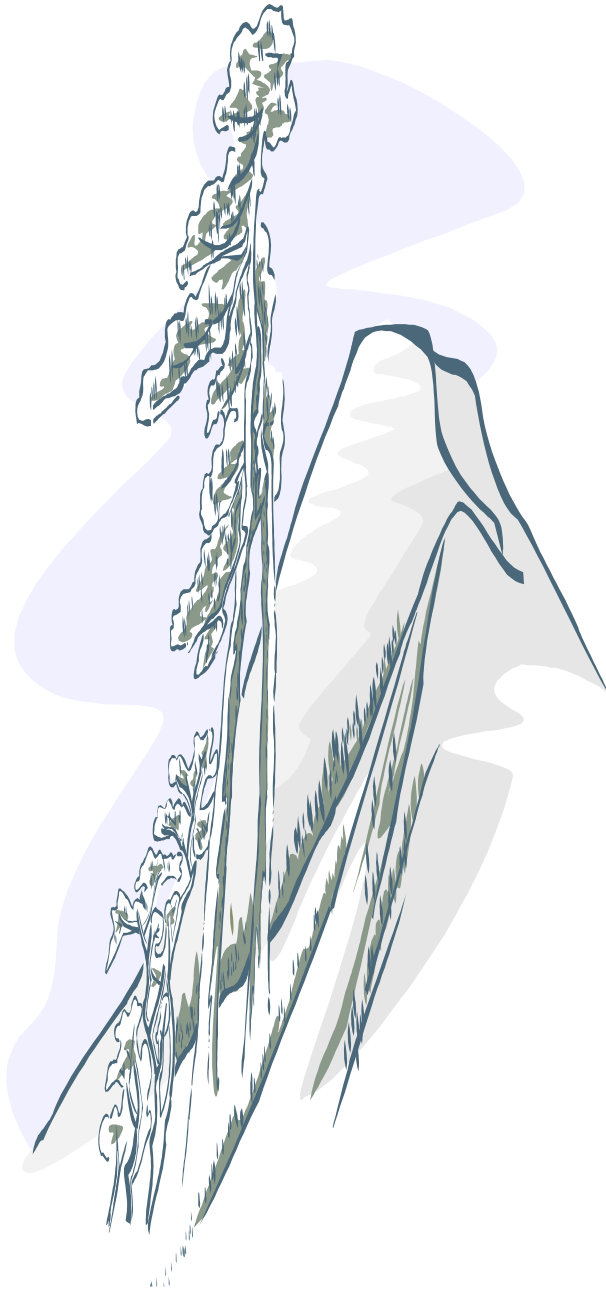
Remove all wet clothing and apply warm, dry clothing. Get into a warm sleeping bag. Warm drinks—even hot water—will restore body heat. Build a fire or start a backpacker stove. Make the victim as comfortable as possible. Advanced symptoms include slurred speech, drowsiness, amnesia and frequent stumbling, a decrease in shivering and hallucinations—followed by stupor, coma and death. The victim may deny he/she is in trouble. Believe the symptoms, not the patient.

Arrest body heat loss and supply external heat. It is necessary to keep the patient awake. To allow the patient to sleep at this juncture is to allow the patient to die. Give the victim warm drinks and build for warmth. Transfer body heat through skin-to-skin contact with another person or persons—the most effective and efficient method of treatment for victims of hypothermia.



Do not hesitate to turn back or stop and make camp if inclement weather should appear. If exposure to wind, cold and wetness should occur, remember—anyone can slip into hypothermia in a matter of minutes.

If you haven't been to this part of the country or you are not use to elevation and cold climate, ask plenty of questions from those who know before embarking on activities for which you may be unprepared.



Please feel free to call, write or visit any of these locations for more information on recreation activities offered in the Stanislaus National Forest:

**Stanislaus National Forest
Supervisor's Office**

19777 Greenley Road
Sonora, CA 95370
(209) 532-3671
TDD: (209) 533-0765
FAX: (209) 533-1890

Mi-Wok Ranger District

24695 Hwy 108
PO Box 100
Mi-Wuk Village, CA 95346
(209) 586-3234
TDD: (209) 586-0262
FAX: (209) 586-0643

Calaveras Ranger District

5519 Hwy 4
PO Box 500
Hathaway Pines, CA 95323
(209) 795-1381
TDD: (209) 795-2854
FAX: (209) 795-6849

Summit Ranger District

#1 Pinecrest Lake Road
Pinecrest, CA 95364
(209) 965-3434
TDD: (209) 965-0488
FAX: (209) 965-3372

Groveland Ranger District

24545 Hwy 120
Groveland, CA 95321
(209) 962-7825
TDD: (209) 962-6406
FAX: (209) 962-7412