

Hot Tips for Cold Weather Hiking

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is easily avoided if you are aware of the symptoms and take steps in advance to keep warm and guard against dehydration and fatigue.

Avoid Hypothermia

- Dress warmly, in layers
- Wear synthetics, such as polypropylene and fleece. Smart wool and merino wool are also good for warmth.
- Protect yourself from the wind, rain and snow
- Move your body to help warm your core
- Remove wet clothing and put on dry, warm layers
- Pack your survival kit, even on day hikes.

Treating Hypothermia

- Move the victim to shelter
- Remove wet clothes, and replace them with warm, dry garments.
- If the victim is alert enough to hold a cup, give warm liquids to drink.
- Insulate the person from the cold ground.
- Mild hypothermia can usually be managed with passive rewarming. This method relies on the victim's own production of heat to rewarm the body. After wet clothing has been removed and the skin dried, the victim should be wrapped in a sleeping bag, blankets, towels, or whatever else is available.
- Moderate hypothermia is often treated first with active rewarming followed by passive rewarming. Active rewarming involves applying an external source of heat to the skin. This can involve placing water that has been warmed on a camp stove or fire into a bottle or hydration bladder and placing it inside the sleeping bag or blanket with the victim. Another human body may also act as a source of active rewarming for a hypothermia victim.
- If the victim is unconscious, seek medical help immediately before rewarming.

Eating Right

Hiking and outdoor activity require a greater amount of energy than many people realize. Prior to your hike, indulge in a carbohydrate-rich meal. Adopt a pattern of "sip and nibble" while hiking. Eat a handful of trail mix and drink water frequently. This will keep your energy level fairly constant. You should consume 2-4 quarts of water per day while hiking.

Stay on the Trail

Always leave a comprehensive trip plan with someone at home before you leave on a trip. Each year dozens of people get lost in the mountains and become subjects of search and rescue missions. In most cases, people simply wander off marked trails and lose their bearings. If you've wandered off the trail, you must stop immediately. In many cases, you can retrace your steps and get yourself back on the trail. If not, follow these steps.

1. Stop and assess the situation. Remain calm.
2. If you're lost above treeline, try to follow cairns and blazes.
3. Orient yourself, using your map and compass.
4. If you're still unable to reorient yourself, the cardinal rule is to stay put.
5. If you have a whistle, blow it in bursts of three to see if someone responds. If not...
6. Try your cell phone, but don't call 911 at least not at first. Call home and if you can't get through try a text message. Keep it positive and simple, something like: I traveled off-trail, am lost, and need help. I was last on [trail name and location on trail] at [time of day]. Add the direction you headed off the trail, if you know it, and any notable landmarks you can see. "Until a search party arrives, stay where you are and keep blowing your whistle. Eat snacks, drink water and stay warm.

7. Self-Rescue

If you become lost and self-rescue is your only option, one technique is to follow a stream downhill. In the Northeast, you'll often end up at a road, although it might require a rugged 10-mile bushwhack.

On the bright side, this method prevents you from wandering in circles and assures you'll have drinking water. (Always purify sourced water before drinking it, if you're able.) You'll also feel proactive, which can help you maintain a positive mental state. If you reach an impasse, such as a waterfall or a cliff, stay within 100 yards of the stream while navigating around the obstacle.