Hypothermia in older adults

New Delhi, Dec 16, 2016: Hypothermia is generally defined as state when a person’s core body temperature drops to 95 degrees Fahrenheit or lower. It can occur either when the outside environment gets too cold or the body’s heat production decreases. Given that the body loses heat faster than it can produce heat, hypothermia can be life-threatening for some.

Older adults are especially vulnerable to hypothermia because underlying medical conditions such as diabetes can diminish their body’s response to cold. The use of some medicines, including over-the-counter cold remedies can also trigger hypothermia in the long-run.

Speaking about the issue, Padma Shri Awardee Dr. K.K Aggarwal, President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and National President Elect Indian Medical Association (IMA), stated that, “Hypothermia can develop in older adults after relatively short exposure to cold weather or even a small drop in temperature. An individual may suffer from hypothermia if he or she has been exposed to cool temperatures and shows one or more of the following signs: slowed or slurred speech; sleepiness or confusion; shivering or stiffness in the arms and legs; poor control over body movements; slow reactions, or a weak pulse”.

Older adults and children are especially prone to hypothermia during peak winter months because their bodies are not able to keep up with the high energy demands required to combat hypothermia.

“When your body temperature drops, your heart, nervous system and other organs can't work normally. Left untreated, hypothermia can eventually lead to complete failure of your heart and respiratory system and sometimes death. Prompt first aid tips include getting the patient to lie down in a warm enclosed area, removing any wet clothing, adding layers of warm clothing, using warm compress or insulations. One should avoid exposure to direct heat as it may cause arrhythmia. In extreme cases, measures like blood rewarming, airway rewarming or warm intravenous saline dripping may be required in a hospital setting”, added Dr. Aggarwal.

Here are a few tips to help prevent hypothermia in the elderly

- Make sure your home is warm enough.
- Set the thermostat to at least 68 to 70 degrees.
- Even mildly cool homes with temperatures from 60 to 65 degrees can trigger hypothermia in older people.
- Use a blanket to keep your legs and shoulders warm and wear a hat or cap indoors.
- When going outside in the cold, it is important to wear a hat, scarf, and gloves or mittens to prevent loss of body heat through your head and hands. A hat is particularly important because a large portion of body heat can be lost through the head.
- Wear several layers of warm loose clothing to help trap warm air between the layers.
- Check if any prescription or over-the-counter medications you are taking may increase your risk for hypothermia.
- Remember hypothermia with no shivering is a bad sign.
About Heart Care Foundation of India

Initiated in 1986, the Heart Care Foundation of India is a leading National NGO working in the field of creating mass health awareness among people from all walks of life and providing solutions for India's everyday healthcare needs. The NGO uses consumer-based entertainment modules to impart health education and increase awareness amongst people. A leading example of this is the Perfect Health Mela; an annual event started in 1993 that is attended by over 2-3 lakh people each year. The Mela showcases activities across categories such as health education seminars and check-ups, entertainment programs, lifestyle exhibitions, lectures, workshops, and competitions. In addition to this, the NGO conducts programs and camps to train people on the technique of hands only CPR through its CPR 10 mantra for revival after a sudden cardiac arrest. They currently hold three Limca book of world records for the maximum number of people trained in hands-only CPR in one go. Keeping article 21 of the Indian Constitution in mind, which guarantees a person Right to Life, Heart Care Foundation of India has also recently initiated a project called the Sameer Malik Heart Care Foundation Fund to ensure that no one dies of a heart disease just because they cannot afford treatment.

For more information, please contact

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