

## HYPOTHERMIA

Hypothermia is not the name of another Japanese superbike. It is a condition brought about by being out doors in cold or even mild temperatures. It affects hikers, hunters, and especially motorcyclists. Understanding it's causes, it's symptoms and it's effects can help us deal with it better. What makes hypothermia so dangerous is that it quietly sneaks up on you and can kill you directly or indirectly, all while temperatures are well above freezing.

*It sneaks up on you and can kill while temperatures are well above freezing*

**Defined:** hypothermia is a lowering of the body's core temperature. A drop of as little as 10 degrees is usually enough to disable even the strongest of men. The lowering occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it. The greatest areas of loss are the groin, the armpits and the head and neck areas. When astride a motorcycle these areas are the most exposed and thus the rider becomes a susceptible candidate for hypothermia.

**Symptoms:** one of the first symptoms is impaired mental judgment, coupled with a lack of coordination and a feeling of weakness. Too often these sensations are passed off as fatigue and ignored. As the condition worsens, the ability to make logical decisions diminishes and the victim fails to take the steps necessary to alleviate the growing problem.

One of the most visual and noticeable signs in the early stages of hypothermia is shivering. Shivering is the body's attempt to generate heat via muscle movement. As the condition advances, shivering will decrease and a sense of euphoria will set in, even though judgment and coordination remain severely impaired. Impaired facilities when piloting a motorcycle can result in a severe, if not fatal accident. The best way to deal with hypothermia is through prevention, and this takes three avenues of approach.

**Prevention:** first, to generate heat your body must have fuel. Stopping often for a snack helps. (Something no one in this chapter should have a problem with.) The body needs easily burnable foods like carbohydrates and sugars to maintain itself between regular meals. Red meats and dairy products provide a slower releasing form of energy, so go ahead and load up on junk food and get that quick sugar buzz. Contrary to popular

opinion, alcohol does not warm you. It dilutes the blood vessels closest to the skin's surface, which actually accelerates heat loss. Now that the rest stop is over and you have generated the heat, you have to move it around.

**Exercise:** on a moving motorcycle you ask? Sure, flex your fingers and toes often and vigorously. Deep, rapid breathing will increase your pulse and circulation will increase dramatically. At rest stops, try deep knee bends or jogging in place to keep the blood moving. Use caution here, you don't want to over exert yourself to the point of sweating. Perspiration will decrease the efficiency of your insulating garments and this is the third and most important part of prevention.

**Dress:** the key to proper dressing is in learning how to layer your clothing. Warm, waterproof boots over two pair of socks should keep your toes toasty. Under your denims, thermal underwear is a must. Leather chaps or full leather pants are also helpful. For your torso, start with a good T-shirt under a flannel shirt or jersey. Add a tasteful wool sweater to that dashing ensemble before you climb into your leather jacket. Remember wool keeps it's insulating value even when wet, cotton does not. Heavy gloves or mittens are an absolute necessity. (I put my heavy gloves in the saddlebag right after Halloween.) Wear a helmet liner. It mats the hair down but keeps the brain sane. A scarf will keep the draft off your neck and a full-face shield will keep that smile from becoming frozen.



Loose fitting, layered clothing accomplishes two things. First, it provides more still air (insulation) between you and the cold air. Secondly, you can adjust to changes in temperature by adding or removing layers as necessary. If you need still more warmth, electric vests, gloves, pants and even socks are available. If you should get caught unexpectedly put on your rainsuit as the first outer layer of clothing.

Cold weather riding can be an enjoyable experience if done correctly. It can lead to a tragedy if done wrong. Snack often, keep the blood circulating and dress properly.

**Ride Safe**

# HYPOTHERMIA

- I WHAT: A LOWERING OF BODY'S TEMPERATURE  
- 10° F spells B/G TROUBLE
- II Where: 3 PRIMARY AREAS: HEAD & NECK  
ARM PIT  
GROIN
- III When: EXPOSURE TO MILD TEMPERATURES
- |        |                      |
|--------|----------------------|
| WIND   | 40 mph = 50° = 25° F |
| CHILL  | 40 mph - 40° = 10° F |
| FACTOR | 40 mph - 30° = -6° F |

## SYMPTOMS

IMPAIRED JUDGEMENT  
LACK OF COORDINATION  
WEAKNESS, FATIGUE

} SHIVERING → EUPHORIA

## FROSTBITE

ACTUAL FREEZING OF TISSUE

## PREVENTION

### I GENERATE HEAT:

SNACK OFTEN  
SUGAR  
&  
CARBOHYDRATES

3 BASIC  
FOOD  
GROUPS

### II MOVE HEAT AROUND → EXERCISE

FLEX FINGERS & TOES  
DEEP RAPID BREATHING  
MOVE AT REST STOPS

(CAUTION:  
DO NOT  
OVEREXERT)

### III PROPER DRESSING → LAYER CLOTHING

FEET: HEAVY BOOTS - 2 PAIR OF SOCKS

LEGS: LONG JOHNS, JEANS, CHAPS

TORSO: "T-SHIRT", FLANNEL SHIRT  
SWEATSHIRT, JACKET

HANDS: HEAVY GLOVES - MITTENS

HEAD: LINER, SKI-MASK, SCARF