

Hypothermia



Introduction

Hypothermia is a condition which occurs when inner body temperature drops to a subnormal level. It impairs a person's ability to think and act rationally and can cause death.

Hypothermia is a major cause of death among outdoor recreationists. When a person is said to have died from "exposure" often the actual cause of death was hypothermia.

Development of Hypothermia

Hypothermia is caused by exposure to cool air or water. It is accelerated by wet or damp clothing, wind, exhaustion, or sudden contact with cold water.



A person's normal core (inner body) temperature is 98.6° degrees F (37° degrees C). When the body begins to lose heat, a person will react in two ways to stay warm:

1. He will shiver.
2. He will probably stamp his feet and move about.

Both of these actions drain energy and slowly lead to exhaustion.

If this continues, the body's energy reserves will be depleted. The body will lose heat faster than it can produce it and the core temperature will drop. As body temperature decreases, the vital internal organs - brain, liver, heart - lose their ability to function. Cooling of the brain seriously

Hypothermia victims first experience uncontrollable shivering, then confusion, loss of memory and finally unconsciousness and may die.

Detection of Hypothermia

Whenever you are outdoors, think about hypothermia. Watch for symptoms of hypothermia in yourself and others.

The following are symptoms of hypothermia:

1. Uncontrollable spells of shivering
2. Slurred or slow speech, incoherent and vague statements
3. Numbness
4. Glassy Stare
5. Apathy
6. Loss of consciousness



Treatment of Hypothermia



General Exposure

A victim of hypothermia may deny he is in trouble. If a person shows symptoms of hypothermia, believe what you see, not what he says. Even mild hypothermia requires immediate treatment.

1. Move the victim of hypothermia to shelter and warmth as quickly as possible. If shelter is not readily available, immediately build a fire to warm the patient.
2. Remove the patient's wet clothes.
3. Apply heat to the patient's head, neck, chest and groin.
 - a) Use warm, moist towels or other cloth material, hot water bottles or heated blankets to warm the patient. As the heated materials cool, replace them with other warm packs.
 - b) If a sleeping bag or blanket is available, place the naked patient in it. Remove your clothing and lay close to the person, inside the bag, allowing the heat from your body to warm the patient.
 - c) As the patient recovers, give him warm drinks. This will help raise the core temperature. Don't give a hypothermia victim alcohol.

Hypothermia and Drowning

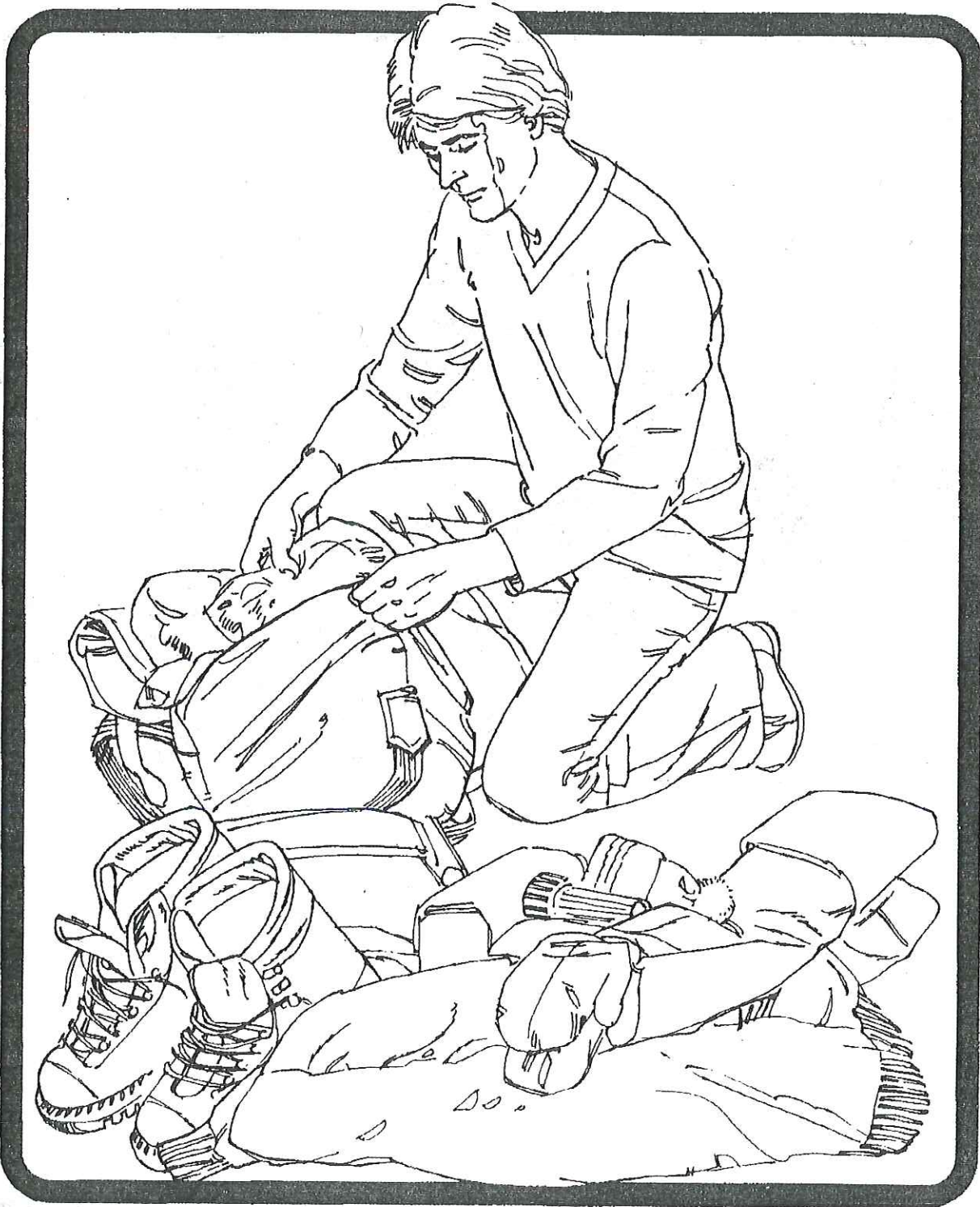
If the victim appears dead:

1. Clear the air passage and begin mouth-to-mouth respiration immediately (see First Aid). Do not worry about getting water out of the patient's lungs.
2. When the patient has begun to breathe on his own, place him in a sleeping bag or blanket to prevent further loss of body heat.
3. Get the patient to the nearest medical facility. Do not permit the patient to walk. Transport him gently and keep him lying down, as still as possible.
4. If the patient does not start breathing, continue mouth to-mouth respiration. Do not give up! Sometimes resuscitation takes a long time before a drowning victim will respond. Drowning victims look dead. Their skin is blue and cold to the touch.

Prevention of Hypothermia

Prevention of hypothermia requires planning before going hunting:

- a) Appoint a "foul weather" leader. This person's responsibility is to watch for danger signs and symptoms of hypothermia in himself and others.
- b) Choose clothing that will keep you dry and warm (see Equipment).
- c) Check weather conditions before you leave.
- d) Prepare and pack a survival kit to carry in your jacket pocket.



Hunting on Land

1. Pace yourself. Do not drive yourself to the point of exhaustion. Concentrate on building a fire and making camp while you still have a reserve of energy.
2. Stay warm and dry. Wearing proper clothing will keep you comfortable and warm even under poor weather conditions. Clothing must provide a layer of insulation,

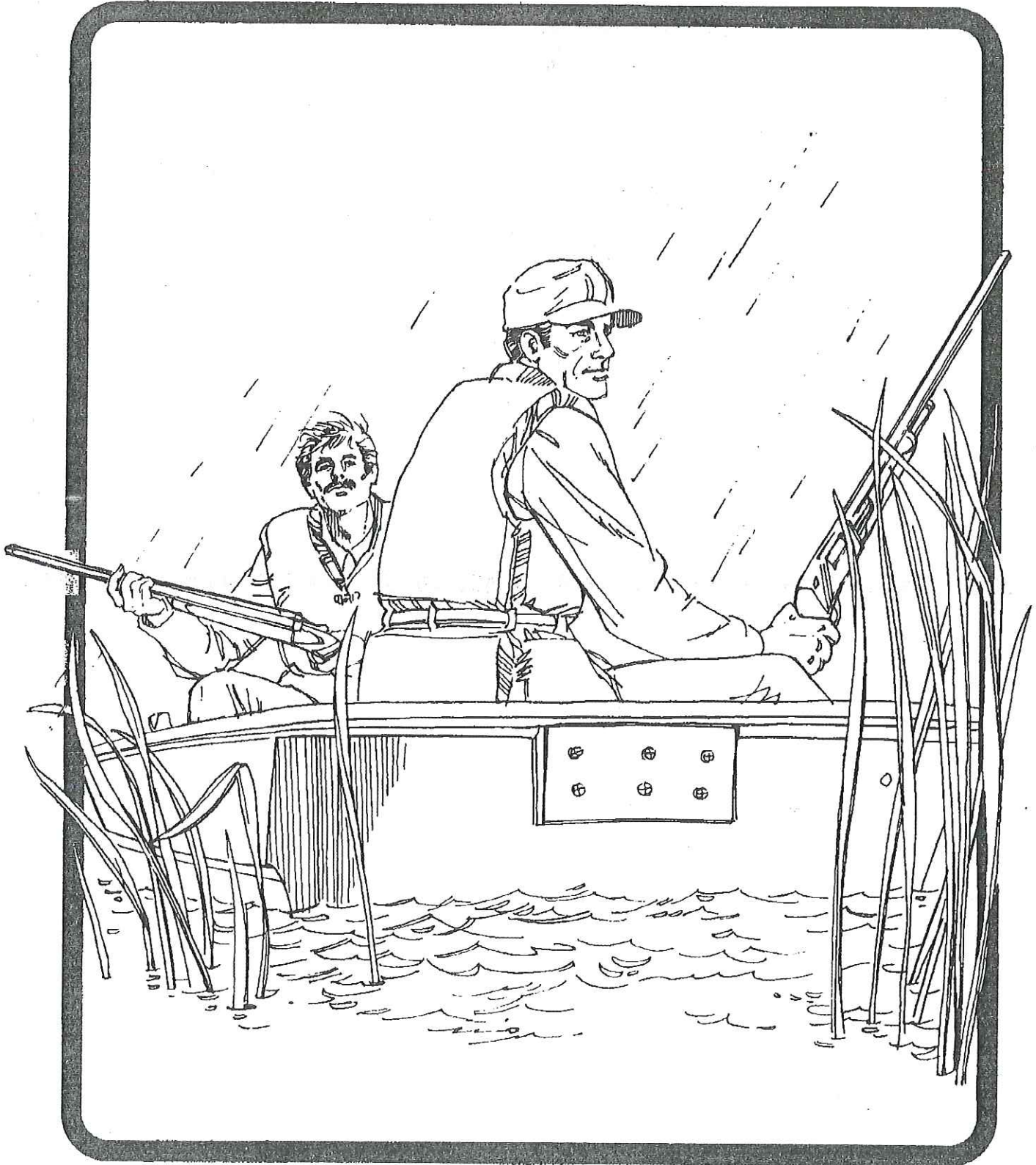
absorb perspiration and be able to shed rain and cut the wind (see Equipment).

3. Get out of the wind. Wind multiplies the problems of staying warm. Even a slight breeze cools the body much faster than still air. Wind can blow under and through clothing and chill the body.



Hunting on Water

1. Avoid exposure to cold water. Make sure your boat is loaded in such a way that the weight is evenly distributed. Always wear a life preserver when in a boat. Do not stand or move around in small boats.
2. If you fall in or your boat capsizes, get out of the water as quickly as possible. Climb into or on the boat. Most boats will float even when capsized or swamped.
3. If you can't get out of the water and are not wearing your life jacket, your pants may be used as a flotation device.





- a) Remove your pants.
 - b) Tie off the ends of your pant legs.
 - c) Quickly dunk the open (waist) end of your pants into the water to inflate the legs.
 - d) Tie off the waist end with a knot or your belt.
 - e) Repeat steps c) and d) as necessary to keep pants afloat.
4. Stay off ice that is less than 2 inches (5 cm) thick. If you break through the ice, extend your arms flat on the ice surface and kick your feet to the surface of the water. Try to squirm the upper part of your body onto the ice. Roll quickly to one side away from the edge. You may have to break the thin ice ahead of you to reach ice thick enough to hold your body weight. Once you are out of the water, immediately get to shore and build a fire to warm yourself and dry your clothing.

(Keep ice claws in an easily accessible location to ensure a quick reaction time).

Notes

