

The cold can kill you

Posted on Dec 10, Posted by [Webmaster](#) Category [John Sloan - Outdoors](#)

We all know you can freeze to death and we have all heard of hypothermia. To put it simply, that is when the body core gets so cold, basic metabolism and body functions do not work. What is cold enough? Would you believe 95 degrees? True dat. When your body core gets to 95 degrees and stays there long enough, you start shivering and possibly having trouble thinking and focusing. Those are signs of early stages of hypothermia.

That day on the Caney Fork, it was in August -- six of us were shivering hard and stumbling as we beached the boats under an interstate bridge. We were caught in a sudden, hard rainstorm and the cold wind off the river chilled us badly. Had we not been able to warm up quickly, it might have been bad. We were finally able to get a fire started and warm some food and were fine. In fact, after a bit we were sweating. And that brings up another problem.

In cold weather, perspiration is your enemy. Unfortunately, I do not perspire. I sweat. In seconds, I can be soaking wet with sweat. That is not good in cold weather. A long or vigorous walk, fully dressed in cold weather gear or dragging a deer can get you in trouble if you don't take precautions. I now often carry one or two outer layers to my stand. I cool down and dress there to avoid being overheated if the walk is more than 75-100 yards.

I used the term; "outer layers" so let us talk about layering. In cold weather, you layer clothes starting with light and building to heavy. In frigid cold conditions, I wear three layers and the layers are of the proper material and weight.

Base Layer - next to the skin.

This layer is super important because it must wick away moisture. That means it allows moisture to pass through and the material next to the skin and the skin stays dry. At the same time, to some degree, it retains body heat. The best I have ever found is pure silk. Who can afford that? So I use two-piece long johns made of some polypropylene mixture. Cotton is your enemy. Cotton is for blowing your nose. A good base layer may be expensive. It is worth it. I have had good results with something called Hollow Core Base Layer. I specify top and bottom instead of a union suit for obvious reasons. The set will cost about \$50.

Second layer -

This layer is a heavier version of the base layer. I use expedition weight material made of 100% polyester, fleeced on both sides to produce not only great wicking but also superb heat retention. Again, I use a two-piece set of top and bottom. That set costs about \$100.

Third layer, the outer layer -

Now you get to really spend some money. My outer layer is a blend of wool and Berber fleece. I wear two-piece pants or bibs and a full jacket. It is warm, relatively light in weight and totally blocks the wind with a wind shear inner layer. That can be important. Cost? You do not want to know and I don't want my wife to know. Expensive? Depends on badly you want to stay warm.

Hats, hoods, and face masks -

On my head, I wear a simple ball cap. Over or under that I wear a 100% wool hood and face mask. Both are easily removable and can double as a neck warmer. The hood is adjustable for safety reasons to allow full visibility. I never wear the hood or mask walking, just the hat. I prefer this over a parka hood because it allows for much better visibility.

Gloves -

With gloves, again I layer. Depending on how cold it is and what I am doing, I may wear anything from light raquetball gloves to good wool gloves under good leather gloves. I also have huge, heavy gloves for truly bitter conditions and I have a set that are battery warmed. They work well but you can't do anything with them on. They are for driving a snow mobile or ATV.

Socks and boots -

Layers again. Light full poly. socks under 100% wool socks. I vary the weight of the wool socks depending on the temperature. For boots, I wear anything from hiking boots to arctic snow pacs. If you favor pacs, be sure to buy an extra set of liners so you always have a dry set.

Disposable warmers -

Best thing since sliced bread. I love the disposable warmers and wear them on many body parts from toes to wrists to thighs to back to neck and more. I buy them by the case and I buy the ones advertised to last 12-hours. I find I can get six to eight hours out of them.

That is how I fight the cold. In Wyoming and Canada, two of the places I mentioned in the overline, I prepared for the cold and had no trouble. On the Caney Fork, I was not and it could have been serious because hypothermia sneaks up on you.

By dressing in layers, as I get active, I prevent overheating by removing layers and carrying them. When I get where I am going, I take a minute or two to cool down and then put them on. I leave the outer layer unzipped until I am completely cooled down. If I start getting warm, I remove the hood and face mask and if need be, unzip or remove the outer layer jacket.

Just a quick tip. When elk hunting or any strenuous activity, I often had my outer layer strapped on my pack but I always had a dry set of base layer and socks in the pack. Many times, I have been glad I did. You sweat a lot, elk hunting.

Keep in mind, both heat and cold can kill you and cotton is your cold weather enemy.

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