Frozen Solid

Protect extremities exposed to this cold-weather threat.

December 3, 2015 By Kate Ferguson

Although many of us don't think much about frostbite during the winter, the fact is that plunging temperatures and icy winds can create the perfect storm for this most common type of freezing injury.

According to the National Weather Service, "as wind speed increases, your body loses heat more rapidly, making the air feel colder than it really is. The combination of cold temperature and high wind can create a cooling effect so severe that exposed flesh can freeze."

In general, frostbite can occur in minutes in extreme cold. But the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons also cautions that you can get frostbite when temperatures are above freezing if there is a strong wind blowing.

Interestingly, frostbite is the body's way of ensuring that our central organs—the heart and lungs—get the blood they need by drawing blood away from our extremities: the hands, feet, nose, cheeks and ears. When blood-drained extremities are exposed to icy winds, frostbite may follow.

Experts also say that if you remember only one thing about this freezing injury, let it be this: Frostbite is easier to prevent than to treat. Generally, to avoid losing any of your body parts to frostbite, pay attention to weather forecasts and wind chill warnings, dress properly for the cold by wearing layers of loose-fitting, warm clothing, and wear mittens instead of gloves.

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