I'm Awfully Cold

Some Seniors May Be Susceptible To Feeling A Chill

As we get older, we are more susceptible to feeling cold. First of all, some seniors are less active than they used to be and do not generate as much body heat. In addition, with age, we become more vulnerable to hypothermia (low heat) in which the body's temperature drops below normal for an extended period of time. This often happens because the system that regulates one's internal temperature responds too slowly to changes in external temperature. So even mildly cold weather or air conditioning can cause problems.

In some cases, there may be days when a person just can't seem to get warm, even if the weather is hot. These symptoms of chills, shivers and cold sweats are warnings that the body is dealing with a problem. (See the list below.) Heed "cold" warnings. Talk to your doctor about possible causes and what you can do to warm up.

Even on warm days you can run a fever that makes your body temperature warmer, yet you are so cold you feel like you are in an ice box.

Causes Of Chills

There are various illnesses and issues that can make a senior more sensitive to cold and/or feel cold. Here are some of them.

- Thyroid disorders.
- Anemia - various types.
- Depression.
- Reactions to medications.

There are also numerous illnesses and issues that may have cold sweats as a symptom. Here are some of them.

- Infections of all kinds and their resulting fever.
- Intense pain, including migraine headaches.
- Lack of estrogen.
- Anxiety and stress.
- Lack of insulin created by diabetes.
- Low blood pressure due to loss of blood.

Why Fever Makes You Cold

When there is an infection in your body (flu, sore throat, etc), the immune system produces lots of infection-fighting white blood cells. The body's thermostat (the hypothalamus) then turns up the heat (fever/pyrexia). There are 3 stages to a fever.

1. To help sustain heat, blood vessels in the skin tighten to keep warmth from escaping through the outer layer. Without adequate circulation of blood, the top layer of skin becomes cool and you get chills. To compensate, muscles may start to contract (shivering). This motion creates more heat and increases the body temperature even more (higher fever).
2. The amount of heat you create equals the amount you lose. This stops the chills and shivering. The body is at its high temperature.
3. The body tries to cool itself down. Blood circulation returns to the skin and you may even start to sweat to aid in bringing down the temperature and breaking the fever.

(Sources: National Institutes of Health, CancerHelp.com, MotherNature.com)

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(800) 505-1730

Suite 11
7128 Miramar Rd.,
San Diego, CA 92121