IT BITES

FROSTBITE OCCURS WHEN THE SKIN AND UNDERLYING TISSUE FREEZES. IT IS MOST COMMON ON THE FINGERS, TOES, NOSE, EARS, CHEEKS, AND CHIN.

KNOW THE SIGNS AND STAGES

Frostnip. The first stage of frostbite is frostnip. With this mild form of frostbite, your skin pales or turns red and feels very cold. Continued exposure leads to prickling and numbness in the affected area. As your skin warms, you may feel pain and tingling. Frostnip doesn't permanently damage the skin. It can be treated with basic first-aid measures, including slowly re-warming the skin.

Superficial frostbite. The second stage of frostbite appears as reddened skin that turns white or pale. The skin may remain soft, but some ice crystals may form in the tissue. Your skin may begin to feel warm — a sign of serious skin involvement. If you treat frostbite with rewarming at this stage, the surface of your skin may appear mottled, blue or purple. And you may notice stinging, burning and swelling. A fluid-filled blister may appear 24 to 36 hours after rewarming the skin.

Severe (deep) frostbite. As frostbite progresses, it affects all layers of the skin, including the tissues that lie below. You may experience numbness, losing all sensation of cold, pain or discomfort in the affected area. Joints or muscles may no longer work. Large blisters form 24 to 48 hours after rewarming. Afterward, the area turns black and hard as the tissue dies.

Seek medical attention for frostbite if: you show signs and symptoms of superficial or deep frostbite—such as white or pale skin, numbness, or blisters; Increased pain, swelling, redness or discharge in the area that was frostbitten; fever; new, unexplained symptoms.

Get emergency medical help if: you suspect hypothermia (when the body loses heat faster than it produces it). Signs and symptoms of hypothermia include: Intense shivering, Slurred speech, Drowsiness and loss of coordination.

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