Care During Hypothermia Treatment for Cardiac Arrest

General Information

Hypothermia treatment cools the body's temperature to 33 C or 91.4 F.

Hypothermia treatment is used for some people whose hearts have stopped beating (cardiac arrest) and who are not able to follow commands (wake up) right after the heart has been restarted.

When the heart stops beating, the body's organs do not receive proper blood flow and oxygen. As a result, brain damage can start in just minutes. Studies have shown this treatment may decrease injury to the brain.

A device will cool your loved one's body temperature to the goal temperature as quickly as possible. The device will keep your loved one at the goal temperature for 24 hours (the "cooling phase").

After the cooling phase, your loved one will be slowly rewarmed to a normal temperature (the "rewarming phase").

The American Heart Association recommends hypothermia treatment to treat some patients after cardiac arrest.

What Happens During Hypothermia Treatment

The hypothermia treatment will be started in the Emergency Department, Cardiac Catheterization Lab or the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). During the treatment, your loved one will be in the ICU.

The health care team members will monitor your loved one's body temperature at all times.

Your loved one will have a breathing tube and will be hooked up to a ventilator (breathing machine). This is to make sure your loved one receives enough oxygen.

There will be many machines to monitor your loved one. Medicine and fluids are given through the IV (intravenous) lines.

Your loved one will not be able to move on their own for the first few days. A medicine will be used to keep them paralyzed (unable to move) during treatment. This will prevent shivering, a natural response to being cold.

Your loved one will receive pain and sedation medicines so they don't feel cold. They will not be able to move or speak during treatment. This is necessary to make sure as much oxygen as possible reaches the brain and other organs.

After your loved one's temperature returns to normal, the medicines used to paralyze and sedate them will be stopped.

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Health Care Team

The health care team helping your loved one includes:

- doctors who specialize in:
- critical care (intensivists)
- cardiology (cardiologists)
- neurology (neurologists)
- respiratory therapists
- critical care nurses
- social worker
- chaplain.

Length of Treatment

- **Cooling phase:**
  - The cooling phase starts as soon as your loved one is cleared for treatment.
  - Your loved one's goal temperature will be maintained for 24 hours.
- **Rewarming phase:**
  - The rewarming phase starts after the 24-hour cooling phase ends.
  - Your loved one's body temperature will slowly be raised back to normal over at least 8 hours.
- **After the rewarming phase**:
  - Health care team members will slowly try to wake your loved one. They may ask your loved one to follow simple commands like squeeze hands or wiggle toes.
  - The nurses, respiratory therapists and doctors will decide when to remove the breathing tube (ventilator).

This process may take many days. There is no way to give a specific time when your loved one will wake up and be able to talk with you.

After Your Loved One Leaves the ICU

After your loved one is stable, they will be transferred from the ICU to a cardiac telemetry unit. Care will be given on the cardiac telemetry unit until they are ready to leave the hospital.

Members of the health care team involved with this phase of care can include:

- speech, occupational and physical therapists
- cardiac rehabilitation therapists
- physiatrists (physical medicine and rehab staff).

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