

# How to Muzzle Frostbite

Frostbite looks like a serious heat burn, but it's actually body tissue that's frozen and, in severe cases, dead. Most often, frostbite affects the toes, fingers, earlobes, chin, and tip of the nose. These body parts are often left uncovered and can freeze quickly. Danger signs are pain (at first), swelling, white skin, and then numbness. Loss of function and absence of pain follow. Blisters may also develop.

Sheer cold causes frostbite, but wind chill speeds up heat loss and increases the risk. Depending on how long you're exposed and how cold or windy it is, frostbite can set in very slowly – or very quickly, before you know what's happening.

The old wives' tale that says you should treat frostbite by rubbing the area with snow or soaking it in cold water is wrong. This treatment is ineffective and dangerous. Instead:

1. •Warm the affected area by soaking in a tub of warm water (101°F to 104°F) and an antiseptic solution, such as the brand Betadine.
2. •Stop when the affected area becomes red, not when sensation returns. (This should take about 45 minutes. If done too rapidly, thawing can be painful and blisters may develop.)
3. •Keep the exposed area elevated, but protected.
4. •Never massage a frostbitten area. Don't break blisters.
5. •Protect the exposed area from the cold. It is more sensitive to re-injury.

If you suspect frostbite, you should go to an emergency room since there is a risk of permanent damage. Also, you may need a tetanus shot.

Needless to say, frostbite is something you should prevent rather than treat. Here are some ways to keep warm if you expect to spend any length of time in the cold.

1. •Layer your clothing. Many layers of thin clothing are warmer than one bulky layer. Air spaces trap body warmth close to the skin, insulating the body against cold. Wear two or three pairs of socks instead of one heavy pair, for example, and wear roomy shoes.
2. •Don't drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes. Alcohol causes blood to lose heat rapidly. Smoking slows down blood circulation to the extremities.
3. •Stay indoors as much as possible when it is very cold and windy.
4. •When you are outside, shield your face, etc. from the wind.