

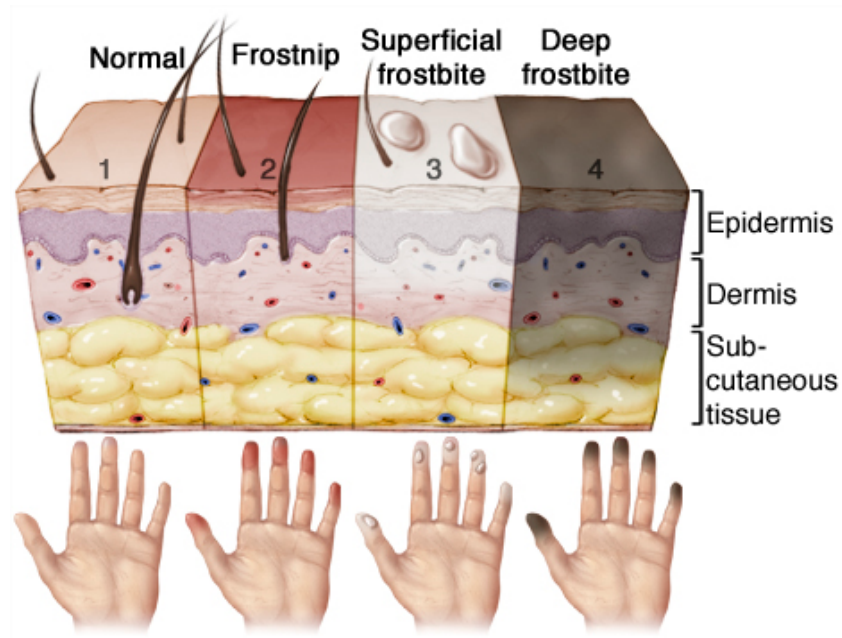
Patient Information: Frostbite

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

What is frostbite? Frostbite is damage to a body part caused by cold. It can be mild or severe. Frostbite is most common on the ears, nose, cheeks, chin, fingers, and toes. Skin affected by frostbite might look white and feel numb or hard.

What are the symptoms of frostbite?

- Cold, numb skin- Skin might look white or gray and feel hard or waxy.
- Trouble moving the affected area
- Blisters with fluid or blood inside
- Areas of black skin- This is a sign of severe frostbite.



How can I help a person who might have frostbite?

- Move the person to a warmer place as soon as possible
- Take off any wet clothing
- Try to warm up the affected area with warm water that feels comfortable when you touch it with unaffected skin. Do NOT use hot water.
- Do not rub the area.
- Do not use a stove or fire to warm the area, because numb skin can get burned by accident.

*If frostbite symptoms don't get better get to a hospital as soon as possible.

How is frostbite treated?

- Warming the affected area with warm moist air
- Medicine to help with blood flow- Frostbite can cause blood clots in affected body parts so doctors might give a medicine to help the blood flow normally again.
- Antibiotics- Tissue that is damaged by frostbite is more likely to get infected. If this happens, doctors can give antibiotic medicines.
- Surgery- Severe frostbite can kill tissue. The dead tissue sometimes falls off by itself, but doctors sometimes need to remove it. Some people with severe frostbite need a kind of operation called "amputation," to remove a damaged body part.

Can frostbite be prevented? Yes! You can prevent frostbite by being careful not to stay out in the cold for too long. Pay attention to the weather forecast. Frostbite can happen in minutes if it is very cold and windy. Dress warmly. It is good to always wear:

- A hat
- Mittens- Mittens (one finger compartment) keep hands warmer than gloves (individual finger compartments).
- Warm, water-resistant shoes or boots
- Layers of clothing- These might include long underwear, fleece or wool clothing, and a coat and pants that protect against wind, rain, and snow.

