

# A course in Hypothermia can save lives

When the strong north polar wind is cutting into your skin, it's an amazing feeling, you feel so alive.

My name is John Laboria, I am an Instructor Trainer and nature reporter and, together with underwater photographer John Fill, have been and are giving courses on hypothermia to mainly divers who like or only can practise in cold waters. We also have mountaineers and skiers.

As I have dived in every ocean on the planet including Arctic and Antarctica, I know what people need.

The course is restricted for a limited number of participants, and includes both theory and practise. The first thing is a doctor's certificate so that all is well to proceed. The theory part explains not only the three stages of hypothermia, mild, moderate and severe but also what comes before and after in a cold immersion which is cold shock response which takes 1 min, cold incapacitation which takes 10 min., hypothermia which can take up to 1 hour depending on the person and the situation followed by circum-rescue collapse.

In water, heat leaves the body 25 times faster than in air.

Participants also learn the importance of hydration. Drinking when you dive is essential, before and after. Some people think this is only necessary when it's hot and they are mistaken as it is as important if not more in cold climates.

I tell them to always take in a bag or in their pocket, a survival blanket, a whistle. And then a flask with warm cocoa, water, tea. Plenty to drink. They are taught how to notice the first symptoms, how to help themselves and others, how to breathe that is with special breathing exercises, meditation, intake of right amount of calories, regular exercise. And many other things.

Then comes the fun. The practise. Everything is ready inside the big tent.

Inside there are blankets, warm drinks, heaters, thermal clothing. Outside the sky is painted red by the wind. It's time to undress, leave all clothes and mainly a polar fleece hat ready, and put on a pair of bathers and a surf vest.

Water temperature is 10 °C, outside temp is 7°C wind is blowing between 70 and 80 Km/h and the wind chill makes the temperature slump to 0 - 2 °C.

It's water time. Everyone gets into the freezing sea. Maximum time to be there is 20 min. Everyone is out between 0 and 5 min. Then after 20 min., I get out and appear inside the tent. And all the questions come. The thing is that after a long time, I have mastered holding my breath, controlling mind and body, being able to decrease my heart beats, or even meditate while diving in the middle of sharks . I explain that what they have been taught now they have to practise over and over and that it needs time. All are warm, listening to the howling wind and mentalising for the next dip.

## About the Author



John Laboria is an Instructor Trainer and nature reporter.