

# Health Tips

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## Health Tip: Carbon Monoxide Poisoning



Carbon Monoxide is a compound composed of carbon and oxygen and has the chemical formula - CO. It is a highly poisonous gas that when inhaled can result in asphyxiation. Carbon monoxide is formed when carbon-containing substances (gas, oil, kerosene, wood, or charcoal) are burned with insufficient amounts of air. Automobiles, space heaters, ranges, ovens, stoves, furnaces, fireplaces, water heaters, and clothes dryers are all common

sources of carbon monoxide production. CO poisoning can occur if appliances are not working or vented properly and dangerous levels of CO build up.

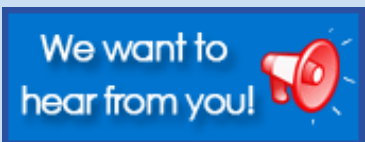
**What causes CO poisoning?** Red blood cells are responsible for transporting oxygen to the body. Since blood cells pick up CO quicker than they pick up oxygen, if there is a lot of CO in the air, the body may replace oxygen in blood with CO. This blocks oxygen from getting into the body, which can damage tissues and result in death.

**Are there symptoms associated with CO poisoning?** Carbon monoxide is a clear, colorless gas, so it can be very difficult to detect. At moderate levels, the most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. Higher levels of CO inhalation can result in loss of consciousness and death. Some people have been fooled into thinking that their symptoms were due to a cold or flu, whereas they were really experiencing CO toxicity.

**How big a problem is CO poisoning?** Each year, approximately 400 people die from CO poisoning and another 20,000 seek emergency treatment in an Emergency Room. The risk of succumbing to CO poisoning is highest among the elderly, those with chronic respiratory or heart problems, children and people with anemia.

**What do I do if I suspect CO poisoning?** If you experience symptoms that you think could be from CO poisoning, get fresh air immediately. Open doors and windows to ventilate the house and turn off all fuel-burning appliances. Go to an Emergency Room as quickly as possible and inform the staff that you suspect CO poisoning. A fairly simple blood test that measures the level of a

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compound called carboxyhemoglobin can be done to help confirm the diagnosis.

**How can I decrease the risk of CO poisoning?** The Centers for Disease Control has offered the following suggestions to help prevent CO poisoning:

- Have your fuel-burning appliances (oil and gas furnaces, gas water heaters, gas ranges and ovens, gas dryers, gas or kerosene space heaters, fireplaces, and wood stoves) inspected by a professional at the beginning of every heating season.
- Choose appliances that vent their fumes to the outside and make sure that they've been properly installed.
- Read and follow instruction manuals that accompany fuel-burning devices.
- Don't idle the car in a garage, even if the garage door is open
- Don't use a gas oven to heat your home, even for a short time.
- Don't use a charcoal grill indoors, even in a fireplace.
- Don't sleep in any room with an unvented gas or kerosene space heater
- Don't ignore symptoms, particularly if more than one person is experiencing them.



**Can I feel safe with a CO detector in the home?** CO detectors should not be



a substitute for proper use and maintenance of your fuel-burning appliances. While many authorities recommend their use, it should be realized that the sensitivity and reliability of these devices varies greatly. Be sure that any CO detector that you buy has received UL certification. Check the batteries every time you check your smoke detector batteries - at least twice a year. If an alarm sounds make sure that it is the CO detector rather than the smoke alarm. If

anyone in the home is experiencing symptoms of CO poisoning take them to an Emergency Room right away. If no one is experiencing symptoms, ventilate the house and turn off all fuel-burning appliances. Have a qualified technician inspect the home for potential sources of CO production.

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