

HOW TO SURVIVE WHEN STUCK ON A MOUNTAIN LEDGE IN A BLIZZARD



Check the mountain above you.

If the rock face above your ledge is vertical or nearly vertical, snow will probably not build up sufficiently to create a serious danger of a slide or avalanche. If the angle of incline allows snow to build up, however, prepare for sliding snow that has accumulated above. Stay as far back from the edge as possible.



Make a guardrail.

Using snow and any available loose rocks, make a large, horizontal mound at the edge of the ledge. This “guardrail” may prevent you from accidentally rolling off if you fall asleep.



Build shelter.

Use a tent, tarp, or bivouac sack to make a windbreak and to prevent snow from accumulating on your ledge and burying you. Secure the material to the rock face using anchors and rope, or with rocks and snow on the edges. If space permits, build a snow cave by making a large pile of snow and hollowing it out. Position the entrance so it faces the mountain, not the open air, if there is room to do so.



Anchor yourself to the ledge.

Use anchors and rope to secure yourself to the rock face. Run the rope through the anchor and tie it tightly around your waist. If anchors are not available, make a loop with the rope and place it over a rock outcropping or a large boulder. The loop should be positioned so that if you fall, it slips further down the outcropping or boulder, rather than off it. Tie a knot in the rope just beyond the loop, then tie the remaining portion of the rope tightly around your waist.



Stay warm.

Put on all available clothing, especially a hat, mittens or gloves, dry socks, and shoes. To reduce heat loss, use any extra clothing as padding and insulation. Place it under you so it acts as a barrier between your body and the snow or rock you are lying on.



Eat and drink.

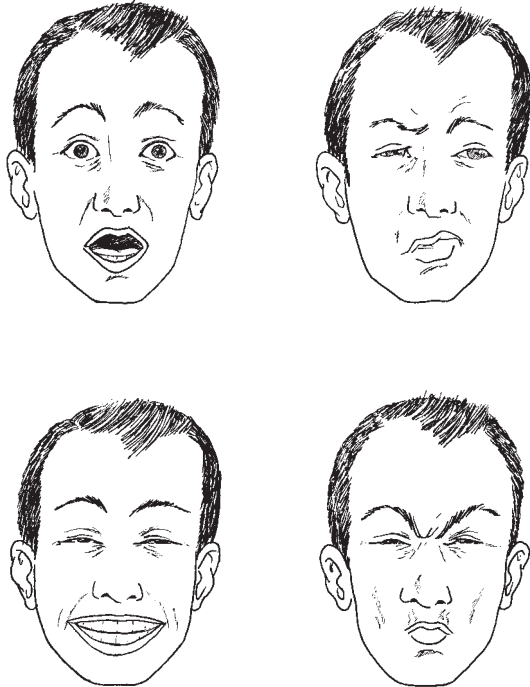
If you do not have water to drink, use a small camping stove to melt snow into drinkable water and to cook any available food. When using the stove in a snow cave, poke a hole in the roof to allow carbon monoxide to escape.



Massage and exercise.

To keep blood circulating and prevent frostbite, massage your hands, fingers, toes, nose, and ears. Muscle activity generates heat, so periodically do push-ups, sit-ups, or just tense and relax muscles to maintain adequate circulation and stay warm.

Facial Expressions to Avoid Frostbite



Flex your facial muscles to increase blood flow.



Wait.

Do not attempt to leave your ledge until the snow has stopped and winds have calmed sufficiently. Most blizzards last a day or two at most, with three days possible but unlikely.

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