

Recognising The Symptoms Of Carbon Monoxide

The symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include severe headaches, dizziness, feeling sick, and a general lack of energy. For this reason, these symptoms are often confused with flu, sometimes with disastrous consequences.

Our blood has a component called haemoglobin, which normally absorbs oxygen in our lungs and carries it to the rest of the body. But haemoglobin absorbs carbon monoxide 240 times more easily than it does oxygen.

So when we inhale carbon monoxide from the air, it is this gas, rather than oxygen, that attaches itself to the haemoglobin, starving the body of oxygen. The smaller the person, the more quickly the body can become overcome by the effects of carbon monoxide.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can easily be confused with:

- Flu
- Severe headaches
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- General lethargy

Severe carbon monoxide poisoning makes the body turn a cherry-red colour. Unlike lack of oxygen due to choking, for example, the body does not turn blue (cyanosis). Instead, the victim's skin will be pink or pale with bright red lips.

The early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are tiredness, headaches and chest or stomach pains. If you experience any of these symptoms while using a gas appliance, you need urgent medical attention.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can affect the victim's mental ability before she or he is even aware that there is a problem. Any effort that increases the body's need for oxygen only makes the problem worse, rapidly leading to collapse and potentially death.