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Hibernating Bears Keep the Thermostat Turned Up

By SINDYA N. BHANOO
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Thanks to a few adventurous black bears that wandered too close to human communities in Alaska, scientists gained a rare glimpse into the species' hibernation habits.

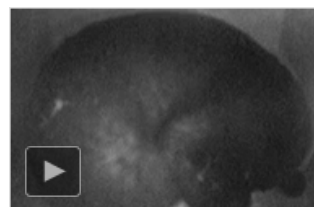
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A young male American black bear after emerging from hibernation.

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Hibernating Black Bear

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The researchers were surprised to find that while bears' body temperature drops only slightly during hibernation, they slow their metabolic activity to about 25 percent of their normal, active rate.

[The findings](#) appear in the current issue of the journal Science.

In other animals, there is generally a more significant change in body temperature when there are metabolic changes, said Craig Heller, a biologist at [Stanford University](#) and one of the study's authors.

But anytime the bears' body temperatures dropped to 86 degrees Fahrenheit, they shivered to warm up, he said.

He and his colleagues also found that while in hibernation, bears do not have a circadian rhythm, and that they spend most of their time in sleep.

The bears in the study were deemed a nuisance by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and were taken to artificial dens, where the researchers were able to closely monitor them.

The research might one day help doctors treat [stroke](#) patients, who could benefit from a lowered brain temperature in the hours after a stroke, Dr. Heller said.

"You can't just pack someone in ice, because the body will fight to stay at a normal temperature," he said. "If you can figure out how bears and other animals do it, you could

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