

# Cold comfort for heart victims

DOCTORS say they can stop brain damage after heart attacks by putting their patients on ice.

Reducing body temperature by at least 7F freezes a flood of harmful chemicals before they can damage the brain.

The hypothermia treatment, kept up for between 12 and 24 hours, results in better brain function and longer survival for patients.

Now Austrian expert Dr Fritz Sterz is calling for a wider availability of cooling techniques which include packing ice round the head, blasts of cool air, injections of cold liquid into the blood

From **Jenny Hope**  
in Vienna

and specially-designed cold helmets.

He said: 'This approach saves the brain function of one in six patients. The drug companies would love to have this outcome with their products.'

Up to 60,000 Britons suffer cardiac arrest each year, of whom around 45,000 die without reaching hospital.

Those who are resuscitated using a defibrillator within four minutes have a good chance of full recovery but others are left with minor or major brain damage.

The reason is post-resuscitation syndrome, a rush of

chemical production which follows the stopping of the heart. Cooling treatment stops the chemicals spreading and gives the body time to dispose of them safely.

Dr Sterz told the European Society of Cardiology meeting in Vienna that 55 per cent of cooled patients survived without brain damage compared to only about a third who were not given the treatment. The death rate was also lower after cooling.

Professor Sir Charles George, medical director of the British Heart Foundation, said last night that improvements in saving

heart attack patients, such as the wider availability of defibrillators, meant that more would need protecting from brain damage.

He said: 'Cooling is an innovative way of improving care but very few hospitals are geared up to do it.'

'We need portable techniques that could go into intensive care units and A and E departments.'

*A quarter of male heart attack victims are too scared of over-exerting themselves to ever make love again, according to research published yesterday.*

*A further two-thirds had sex only 'rarely'.*