

HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS

People suffer heat-related illness when the body cannot properly cool itself. Sweating is the body's natural air conditioning, but when a person's body temperature rises rapidly, sweating just isn't enough.

Heat-related illnesses can be serious and life threatening. Very high body temperatures may damage the brain or other vital organs, and can cause disability and even death. Heat-related illnesses and deaths are preventable.

Heat Stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. It happens when the body's temperature rises quickly and the body cannot cool down. Heat Stroke can cause permanent disability and death. *See the other side for symptoms of Heat Stroke and what to do.*

Heat Exhaustion is a milder type of heat-related illness. It usually develops after a number of days in high temperature weather and not drinking enough fluids. *See the other side for symptoms of Heat Exhaustion and what to do.*

Heat Cramps usually affect people who sweat a lot during demanding activity. Sweating reduces the body's salt and moisture and can cause painful cramps—usually in the abdomen, arms, or legs. Heat cramps may also be a symptom of heat exhaustion. *See the other side for symptoms of Heat Cramps and what to do.*

Because heat-related illnesses and deaths are preventable, people need to know who is at greatest risk and what actions can be taken.

Who's at Risk

Those at highest risk include the elderly, the very young, people with mental illness and people with chronic diseases. However, even young and healthy individuals can succumb to heat if they participate in demanding physical activities during hot weather without taking proper precautions.

Other conditions that can increase your risk for heat-related illness include obesity, fever, dehydration, poor circulation, sunburn, and prescription drug or alcohol use.

How to Prevent Heat-Related Illness

Here's how you can protect yourself from heat-related illnesses:

- Drink plenty of non-carbonated liquids like water or electrolyte-enriched liquids to replace the fluids even if you don't feel thirsty.
- Avoid liquids that have alcohol, caffeine or lots of sugar because they will speed up fluid loss.
- Stay in air-conditioned areas such as malls, libraries, movie theatres and community centers. Even a few hours can cool your body's temperature.
- If you feel very hot, cool off by taking a cool bath or shower. Opening a window or using a fan may not prevent heat-related illnesses.
- Do not cool children in alcohol baths. Cool, plain water baths or moist towels work best.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing, such as cotton, so sweat can evaporate.
- NEVER leave anyone in closed, parked cars during hot weather.
- Do not bundle babies in blankets or heavy clothing. Infants do not tolerate heat well because their sweat glands are not fully developed.
- Check on older adults, infants and young children frequently and make sure they are hydrated and cool. Watch for symptoms of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

If you must be in the heat, here are some things you should do:

- Drink plenty of liquids.
- Limit physical activity to morning and evening hours. Avoid physical activity or exercise between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. that are typically the hottest part of the day.
- Wear a wide-brimmed, vented hat or use an umbrella because your head absorbs heat easily.
- Put on sunglasses and sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher.
- Rest often in shady areas.

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(Continued) **HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS**

Symptoms of Heat Stroke

Warning signs of heat stroke vary but may include the following:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F, orally)
- Red, hot, and dry skin (a person will usually not sweat)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Unconsciousness

What to do for Heat Stroke

If you see someone with these warning signs, it is a medical emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance and begin cooling the person:

- Get the person to a shady area.
- Cool the person quickly using whatever you can – put them in a tub or shower of cool water; spray them with cool water from a garden hose; sponge them with cool water; do not immerse in ice.
- Monitor body temperature, and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101-102°F.
- If there is vomiting, make sure the airway remains open by turning the person on his or her side.
- Do not give the person fluids to drink.
- Get medical assistance as soon as possible.

Symptoms of Heat Exhaustion

This is the body's response losing a lot of water and salt that's in sweat. People most likely to get heat exhaustion are the elderly, people with high blood pressure, and people working or exercising in a hot environment. Warning signs of heat exhaustion include:

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or Vomiting
- Fainting

Also, the skin may be cool and moist. The person's pulse will be fast and weak, and breathing will be fast and shallow. If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may develop into heat stroke.

What to do for Heat Exhaustion

Seek medical attention immediately if the symptoms are severe or the person has heart problems or high blood pressure. Otherwise, cool off the person, and seek medical attention if the symptoms worsen or last longer than one (1) hour.

The person can cool off by doing the following:

- Drink cool, nonalcoholic beverages.
- Rest in a cool or air-conditioned place.
- Take a cool shower, bath or sponge bath.
- Put on lightweight clothing.

Symptoms of Heat Cramps

Heat cramps usually affect people who sweat a lot during demanding activity. Heat cramps may also be a symptom of heat exhaustion.

What to do for Heat Cramps

If medical attention is not necessary, take these steps:

- Stop all activity, and sit quietly in a cool place.
- Drink clear juice or a sports beverage.
- Do not return to demanding activity for a few hours after the cramps subside. Further activity could lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Seek medical attention for heat cramps if they do not stop after 1 hour.

If you have any *non-urgent* questions about Heat-Related Illness, please contact the **Public Health Information Line** at 408.885.3980. Public Health Department staff members are available to answer your questions Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For information, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Web site at www.cdc.gov for additional information.

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