

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



July, 2012

Heat-Related Illness -- The Basics

Prolonged or intense exposure to hot temperatures can cause heat-related illnesses, such as heat exhaustion, heat cramps, and heat stroke (also known as sun stroke). As your body works to cool itself under extreme or prolonged heat, blood rushes to the surface of your skin. As a result, less blood reaches your brain, muscles, and other organs. This can interfere with both your physical strength and your mental capacity, leading, in some cases, to serious danger.

With prompt treatment, most people recover completely from heat illness. However, heat stroke can be deadly if not properly managed.

What Causes Heat-Related Illnesses?

Heat illness can strike virtually anyone. But chronic alcoholics, the elderly, the young, the obese, and individuals whose immune systems may be compromised are at greater risk, as are individuals taking certain drugs, such as antihistamines, antipsychotic medications, and cocaine. High humidity also increases the risk of heat illness because it interferes with the evaporation of sweat, your body's way of cooling itself.



Heat exhaustion, heat cramps, and heat stroke all occur when your body cannot cool itself adequately. But each is slightly different.

Heat exhaustion occurs when the body loses large amounts of water and salt through excessive sweating, particularly through hard physical labor or exercise. This loss of essential fluids can disturb circulation and interfere with brain function. Individuals who have heart problems or are on low-sodium diets may be particularly susceptible to heat exhaustion.

As in heat exhaustion, heat cramps can strike when the body loses excessive amounts of fluids and salt. This deficiency, accompanied by the loss of other essential nutrients such as potassium and magnesium, typically occurs during heavy exertion.

Heat stroke, the most serious of the heat-related illnesses, occurs when the body suffers from long, intense ex-

posure to heat and loses its ability to cool itself. In prolonged, extreme heat, the part of the brain that normally regulates body temperature malfunctions. This decreases the body's ability to sweat and, therefore, cool down. Those who have certain medical conditions -- such as scleroderma or cystic fibrosis -- that decrease the body's ability to sweat may be at greater risk of developing heat stroke.

What Are the Symptoms of Heat-Related Illnesses?

Heat cramp symptoms include:

- Severe, sometimes disabling, cramps that typically begin suddenly in the hands, calves, or feet
- Hard, tense muscles

Heat exhaustion symptoms include:

- Fatigue
- Nausea

(Over)

Heat-Related Illness -- The Basics (Continued)

- Headaches
- Excessive thirst
- Muscle aches and cramps
- Weakness
- Confusion or anxiety
- Drenching sweats, often accompanied by cold, clammy skin.
- Slowed or weakened heartbeat.
- Heat exhaustion requires immediate attention but is not usually life-threatening.

Heat stroke symptoms include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Headache
- Dizziness or vertigo
- Fatigue
- Hot, flushed, dry skin
- Rapid heart rate
- Decreased sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Decreased urination
- Blood in urine or stool

Heat stroke can occur suddenly, without any symptoms of heat exhaustion. If a person is experiencing symptoms of heat exhaustion or heat stroke, GET MEDICAL CARE IMMEDIATELY. Any delay could be fatal. Seek emergency medical care for anyone who has been in the heat and who has the following symptoms:

- Confusion, anxiety, or loss of consciousness
- Very rapid or dramatically slowed heartbeat
- Rapid rise in body temperature that reaches 104 to 106 degrees Fahrenheit
- Either drenching sweats accompanied by cold, clammy skin (which may indicate heat exhaustion); or a marked decrease in sweating accompanied by hot, flushed, dry skin (which may indicate heat stroke)
- Convulsions

Any other heat-related symptom that is not alleviated by moving to a shady or air-conditioned area and administering fluids and salts

Heat Exhaustion Treatment

Call 911 if the person:

Has a very high, weak pulse rate and rapid shallow breathing, especially when combined with high or low blood pressure

Is unconscious, disoriented, or has a high body temperature

Has warm, dry skin, elevated or lowered blood pressure, and is hyperventilating

Source: webmd.com

Your Eyes And The Sun

Don't Forget the Eyes

Sunlight reflecting off snow, sand, or water further increases exposure to UV radiation, increasing your risk of developing eye problems such as cataracts. The right sunglasses can protect your eyes. Long hours on the beach or in the snow without adequate eye protection also can result in a short-term condition known as photokeratitis, or reversible sunburn of the cornea. This painful condition -- also known as "snow blindness" -- can cause temporary loss of vision. When buying sunglasses, look for a label that specifically offers 99%-100% UV protection. This assures that the glasses block both forms of UV radiation. Eyewear should be labeled "sunglasses." Be wary of dark or tinted eyewear sold as fashion accessories that may provide little or no protection from UV or visible light. Ask an eye care professional to test your sunglasses if you're not sure of their level of UV protection. Sun safety is never out of season.