

# HEALTH AWARENESS

July 2022

## HEAT-RELATED ILLNESSES



As temperatures soar, the risk of heat-related illness increases. These illnesses are caused when the body's cooling mechanisms (i.e., sweating, radiating heat, etc.) are unable to lower the body's core temperature, usually as the result of physical activity and/or high temperatures. People with pre-existing medical conditions, the elderly, and young children are most at risk for heat-related illnesses. There are three heat-related syndromes: heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke.

### HEAT CRAMPS

Heat cramps are the mildest of the heat-related syndromes. While the exact cause of heat cramps is unknown, doctors believe that an electrolyte imbalance brought on by heavy sweating is most likely to blame. As we sweat, our bodies lose sodium, potassium, calcium, and magnesium. The loss of these nutrients can result in chemical changes in body tissue.

Heat cramps are characterized by painful, involuntary muscle spasms. Calves, thighs, or shoulders are the muscles most likely to be affected. Heat cramps often go away on their own after resting and restoring the body's electrolyte balance. However, if the cramps do not go away and you cannot drink electrolyte-rich fluids because of nausea or vomiting, contact a doctor. IV rehydration with normal saline may be necessary. Heat cramps may occur in conjunction with heat exhaustion.

### HEAT EXHAUSTION

Heat exhaustion is caused when your body cannot cool itself, usually due to exertion during high heat. While not as severe as heat stroke, heat exhaustion symptoms should not be ignored.

### SYMPTOMS OF HEAT EXHAUSTION

- Confusion
- Dark-colored urine

*(Article is continued on reverse side.)*

- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle cramps
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Pale skin
- Profuse sweating
- Rapid heartbeat

Immediately treating heat exhaustion by drinking plenty of fluids, removing unnecessary clothing, taking a cool shower or bath, or applying other cooling methods (e.g., ice towels, fans, etc.) can prevent the exhaustion from becoming more serious.

## HEATSTROKE

Heatstroke occurs when the body overheats, reaching temperatures above 104°F. It is a serious condition that can cause brain damage, internal organ damage, and death. Heatstroke requires immediate medical attention. The longer treatment is delayed, the greater the risk of serious complications, so it is important to know and recognize heatstroke symptoms.

## SYMPTOMS OF HEATSTROKE

- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness and light-headedness
- Lack of sweating
- Red, hot, dry skin
- Muscle weakness or cramps
- Nausea and vomiting
- Rapid heartbeat, either strong or weak
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Behavioral changes (e.g., confusion, disorientation, staggering, etc.)
- Seizures
- Unconsciousness

Heat cramps and heat exhaustion usually precede heatstroke. These milder forms of heat-related illnesses can serve as a warning sign to seek treatment before the onset of heatstroke. However, heatstroke can occur without prior symptoms.

## AVOIDING HEAT-RELATED ILLNESSES

The Mayo Clinic recommends people take the following precautions:

## BENEFITS CORNER

# WORKPLACE WELLNESS



## TIME WELL SPENT

The County Health Pool, through our partnership with Anthem, offers members numerous resources to manage their health, including Time Well Spent. This web-based resource allows employers to develop a wellness strategy or plan.

Time Well Spent at [www.timewellspent.anthem.com](http://www.timewellspent.anthem.com) provides educational materials, including interactive campaigns on topics like quitting smoking, nutrition, and emotional health. Other tools include a year-long calendar of monthly health education topics aligned with national health observances, FitLife podcasts full of practical and fun health tips, and wellness webinars offering helpful advice. Employers can share these resources with employees as part of an organization-wide wellness plan.

As always, CTSI staff is here to assist you with your health, dental, vision, or life insurance coverage. You can reach us at 303 861 0507.

- Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, light-colored clothing
- Avoid sunburn
- Seek cooler places
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Avoid hot spots (i.e., parked cars)
- Let your body acclimate to the heat

If possible, avoid strenuous activity during high heat. If you must work in those conditions, take frequent breaks and stay hydrated. 