

Heat-related Illnesses

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body can no longer control its temperature: the body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. When heat stroke occurs, the body temperature can rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause permanent disability or death if the person does not receive immediate and aggressive emergency treatment.

Symptoms of heat stroke include:

- Confusion, altered mental status, slurred speech
- Loss of consciousness
- Hot, dry skin or profuse sweating
- Seizures
- Extremely high body temperature
- Fatal if treatment delayed

First Aid

Take the following steps to treat a person with heat stroke:

- Call 911 for emergency medical care.
- Stay with the person until emergency medical services arrive.
- Move the person to a shaded, cool area and remove outer clothing.
- Cool the person quickly, using the following methods:
 - With a cold water or ice bath, if possible
 - Wet the skin/place cold wet cloths on the skin
 - Soak clothing with cool water
 - Circulate/fan the air around the person to speed cooling.
 - Place cold wet cloths or icepacks on the head, neck, armpits, and groin.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is the body's response to an excessive loss of water and salt, usually through excessive sweating. Heat exhaustion is most likely to affect:

- The elderly
- People with high blood pressure and/or on certain medications
- Those exercising/working in a hot environment
- Lack of cardiovascular conditioning and/or not acclimated to heat
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Use of performance-enhancing supplements
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Symptoms of heat exhaustion include:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Weakness
- Irritability
- Thirst
- Heavy sweating
- Elevated body temperature
- Decreased urine output

First Aid

Treat a person who has heat exhaustion by doing the following:

- Call 911 if medical care is unavailable.
- Have someone stay with the person until help arrives.
- Remove the person from the hot area and give liquids to drink.
- Remove unnecessary clothing, including shoes and socks.
- Cool the person with cold compresses or have them wash their head, face, and neck with cold water.
- Encourage frequent sips of cool water.

Prevention

- Be aware of the heat index
- Judicious use of alcohol
- Be aware of medications such as diuretics, antidepressants, and antihistamines can make us more prone to dehydration
- Maintain adequate hydration throughout exercise
- Pre-hydrate, hydrate during exercise and post-hydrate