

Surviving the Hot Weather

Heat illness includes a range of disorders that result when your body is exposed to more heat than it can handle. The human body is constantly engaged in a life-and-death struggle to disperse the heat that it produces. If allowed to accumulate, the heat would quickly increase your body temperature beyond its comfortable 98.6° F.

Who is at risk?

Heat-related illness can affect anyone not used to hot weather, especially when it's combined with high humidity.

Those especially at risk:

- Infants, young children, elderly and pets
- Individuals with heart or circulatory problems or other long-term illness
- Employees working in the heat
- Athletes and people who like to exercise (especially beginners)
- Individuals taking certain medications that alter sweat production
- Alcoholics and drug abusers

Heatstroke

Heatstroke is the most serious and life-threatening heat-related illness. In certain circumstances, your body can build up too much heat, your temperature may rise to life-threatening levels, and you can become delirious or lose consciousness. If you do not rid your body of excess heat fast enough, it "cooks" the brain and other vital organs. It is often fatal, and those who do survive may have permanent damage to their vital organs.

Symptoms of heatstroke

- The victim's body feels extremely hot when touched.
- Altered mental status (behavior) ranging from slight confusion and disorientation to coma.
- Conscious victims usually become irrational, agitated, or even aggressive and may have seizures.
- In severe heatstroke, the victim can go into a coma in less than one hour. The longer the coma lasts, the lower the chance for survival.

What to do

1. Move person to a half-sitting position in the shade.
2. Call for emergency medical help immediately.
3. If humidity is below 75%, spray victim with water and vigorously fan. If humidity above 75%, apply ice packs on neck, armpits or groin.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is characterized by heavy perspiration with normal or slightly above normal body temperatures. It is caused by water or salt depletion or both (severe dehydration). Heat exhaustion affects workers and athletes who do not drink enough fluids while working or exercising in hot environments.

Symptoms of heat exhaustion include:

- Severe thirst, fatigue, headache, nausea, vomiting and sometimes diarrhea.
- The affected person often mistakenly believes he or she has the flu.
- Uncontrolled heat exhaustion can evolve into heatstroke.

Other symptoms

- Profuse sweating
- Clammy or pale skin
- Dizziness
- Rapid pulse
- Normal or slightly above normal body temperature

What to do

1. Sit or lie down in the shade.
2. Drink cool, lightly salted water or sports drink.
3. If persistent, gently apply wet towels and call for emergency medical help.

Heat Cramps

Heat cramps are painful muscular spasms that happen suddenly affecting legs or abdominal muscles. They usually happen after physical activity in people who sweat a lot or have not had enough fluids. Victims may be drinking water without adequate salt content.

What to do

1. Sit or lie down in the shade.
2. Drink cool, lightly salted water or sports drink.
3. Stretch affected muscles.