

Heat Stress

People suffer heat-related illness when their bodies are unable to compensate and properly cool themselves. The body normally cools itself by sweating. But under some conditions, sweating just isn't enough.

Heat stress can result in heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps, or heat rashes.

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related disorder. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature.

Symptoms

- Hot, dry skin or profuse sweating
- Hallucinations
- Chills
- Throbbing headache
- High body temperature
- Confusion/dizziness
- Slurred speech

Heat Exhaustion

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

Symptoms

- Heavy sweating
- Extreme weakness or fatigue
- Dizziness, confusion
- Nausea
- Clammy, moist skin
- Pale or flushed complexion
- Muscle cramps
- Slightly elevated body temperature

Heat Rash

Heat rash is a skin irritation caused by excessive sweating during hot, humid weather.

Symptoms

- Heat rash looks like a red cluster of pimples or small blisters.
- It is more likely to occur on the neck and upper chest, in the groin, under the breasts, and in elbow creases.

Heat Cramps

Heat cramps are usually due to excessive sweating. Sweating depletes the body's salt and moisture levels. Low salt levels in muscles causes painful cramps. Heat cramps may also be a symptom of heat exhaustion.

Symptoms

- Muscle pain or spasms usually in the abdomen, arms, or legs.

Things To Do To Stay Cool

During hot weather you will need to increase your fluid intake, regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink. Don't drink liquids that contain alcohol, or large amounts of sugar—these actually cause you to lose more body fluid. Heavy sweating removes salt and minerals from the body. A sports beverage can replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat.

However, if you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage or taking salt tablets.

Wear light-colored, loose-fitting, breathable clothing such as cotton.

Avoid non-breathing synthetic clothing.

If you must go outdoors, protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat along with sunglasses, and by putting on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher 30 minutes prior to going out.

Try to limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours. Try to rest often in shady areas so that your body's thermostat will have a chance to recover. If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, STOP all activity. Get into a cool area or at least into the shade and rest, especially if you become lightheaded, confused, weak, or faint.

People at greater risk of heat stress include infants, those who are 65 years of age or older, those that are overweight, those who are physically ill, especially with heart disease or high blood pressure, or who take certain medications, such as for depression, insomnia, or poor circulation.