

Heat

Heat can create serious health problems. Usually the elderly, the very young, the sick and those without access to air conditioning are most severely affected by heat.

Symptoms of heat illness include heavy sweating, muscle cramps, weakness, dizziness, nausea, weak but rapid pulse, and headaches. People with these symptoms should find shade, drink water slowly and make sure there is good ventilation.

If fluids are not replaced soon enough, heat stroke can follow causing extremely high body temperature, red and dry skin, rapid pulse, confusion, brain damage, loss of consciousness and death. To help a person showing severe symptoms, get the victim into shade, call for emergency medical services and start cooling the person immediately with cool water or by fanning.

Staying in an air-conditioned area, either at home or in a public place such as a mall, library or recreation center, is the most effective way to combat heat. If air conditioning is not available, pull the shades over the windows and use cross-ventilation and fans to cool rooms. A cool shower or bath also is an effective way to cool off. Limit the use of stoves and ovens to keep home temperatures lower.

Children especially can quickly become dehydrated. They need to drink fluids frequently, especially water, and wear light- colored, loose-fitting clothes. Avoid drinks that are heavily sweetened or contain caffeine. Check on children often, especially if they are playing outside in high temperatures.

Other heat precautions include:

- Never leave anyone in a closed, parked vehicle during hot weather, even for a short time.
- Drink plenty of fluids but avoid drinks with alcohol, caffeine or a lot of sugar. Start drinking fluids before going out into the heat.
- Plan strenuous outdoor activity for early morning or evening when the temperature is lower.
- Take frequent breaks when working outside.
- Wear sun block, hats and light-colored, loose-fitting clothes.
- Stay indoors in air conditioning as much as possible.
- Eat more frequently, but be sure meals are well balanced and light.
- Don't dress infants in heavy clothing or wrap them in blankets.
- Check frequently on the elderly and those who are ill or may need help.
- Check with a doctor about the effects of sun and heat when taking prescription drugs, especially diuretics or antihistamines.
- At first signs of heat illness move to a cooler place, rest a few minutes, then slowly drink a cool beverage. Seek medical attention immediately if conditions do not improve.

The best defense against heat-related illness is prevention. Staying cool, drinking plenty of fluids, wearing cool clothing and monitoring outdoor activities are keys to staying healthy in hot weather.