

Don't Sweat the Sun

*Acknowledgements: Debbie Feldman
Today's Supervisor, National Safety Council, July 2001*

Heat exhaustion is one of several common heat related illnesses. These also include heat rash (prickly heat), sunburn, heat cramps and heat stroke. People with cardiovascular disease or diabetes, which are not physically fit, have excess weight, are over the age of 50, or take certain medications (antihistamines, diuretics) are at higher risk to heat related illnesses.

Hot Bodies

Your body normally maintains a constant temperature of (98.6° F) by balancing how much heat it produces with how much it loses. Your body cools itself by sweating or evaporating fluid from your skin. But when it's very hot outside, it may not lose that heat fast enough to maintain its temperature. The system breaks down and your body gains more heat than it loses. The result is heat stress.

Warning Signs

Here are the signs and symptoms of heat related illnesses:

- *Heat Rash* - small red raised blisters, skin feels itchy and prickly.
- *Heat Cramps* - muscle pain or muscle spasms, most common in the arms, legs, back and stomach.
- *Heat Exhaustion* - pale, flushed face and neck; clammy skin; heavy sweating; fatigue; shortness of breath; headache, dizziness or fainting; nausea and vomiting; rapid heartbeat and breathing.
- *Heat Stroke* - hot dry skin; sweating erratic behavior; reduced mental alertness; weakness; dilated pupils; loss of consciousness. Heat stroke is a medical emergency. If untreated, it can lead to a coma and death.

Turn down the heat

To protect yourself from heat stress, it's extremely important to replenish your fluids. Drink a quart of water (32 oz.) every hour. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after you work in the heat, even if you aren't thirsty.

Electrolyte sport drinks are the best fluids to drink during the hottest summer months. These beverages replenish your body with carbohydrates and electrolytes, like sodium and potassium. You can make your own sports drink by mixing 8 ounces of water, one teaspoon of lemon juice, ¼ teaspoon salt, and 4 teaspoons sugar. Here are some other ways to combat heat-related illnesses:

- Wear loose, light-colored clothing that wicks moisture away from your skin.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat.
- Take frequent rest breaks in a cool shady area.
- Work in the coolest parts of the day (early mornings or evenings) when possible.
- Wear air-cooled suits or ice vests in extremely hot situations.

Heat treatment

If you feel stressed from the heat, tell your supervisor right away. Treat heat-related illnesses as follows:

- *Heat Cramps* - Stop work, drink fluids, and rest in a cool area. Drink electrolyte fluids.
- *Heat Exhaustion* - Move the person to a cool place to rest. Remove as much clothing as possible. Sponge them with cool water and fan them; give cool water or an electrolyte drink if they are conscious and not nauseated; seek medical attention.
- *Heat Stroke* - This is a medical emergency. Take the victim to an emergency room immediately. Place ice packs on the person's neck, armpits, and groin; sponge them with cool water and fan them, or immerse them in cool water or ice. Cover them with a wet sheet if possible.

Too Long in the Sun – Helpful Information about Skin Cancer

According to the University of Arizona Cancer Center, one out of six Americans will develop skin cancer in his or her lifetime, and about 1 million new cases of skin cancer are diagnosed in the United States each year. Those with fair or red hair, freckles, blue eyes, or who burn easily are at greater risk. Avoid working during the sun's brightest times of the day—between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Wear clothing with long sleeves, neck flaps, and hats with large brims.

The American Academy of Dermatology recommends applying a sunscreen liberally and frequently (every two hours) while working outdoors. Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. Be sure to tell your doctor that you have an outdoor job, and check your skin regularly for any changes in moles, freckles or skin discoloration. Skin damage from sun exposure accumulates over a lifetime.

For more information, see the American Academy of Dermatology's Website at: <http://www.aad.org/pamphlets/index.html>