

Tips for Preventing Heat-Related Illness



Every year more than 500 people in the U.S. die from heat-related illness. **High temperatures, high humidity, sunlight, and heavy workloads** increase the likelihood of heat stress. Understanding how to deal with heat stress can help to prevent or reduce accidents and is important to workers' health and well-being.

By recognizing the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness, you can help some who's in distress or help prevent it from happening in the first place. Use the following tips to help prevent heat-related illness:

- Drink more fluids (nonalcoholic), regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink; by then you're already dehydrated.
- Don't drink liquids that contain alcohol or large amounts of sugar – these actually cause you to lose more body fluid.
- Stay indoors and, if at all possible, in air-conditioning. If you don't have air-conditioning, go to a shopping mall or public library – even a few hours spent in air-conditioning can help your body stay cooler when you go back to the heat.
- Electric fans may provide comfort, but when the temperature reaches the high 90s or above, fans WILL NOT prevent heat-related illness. Taking a cool shower or bath or moving to an air-conditioned location is a much better way to cool off.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing made of natural fibers like cotton. Synthetic fibers like polyester don't breathe and won't allow for evaporation of sweat, which cools your body.
- **NEVER leave a person or a pet in a closed vehicle.** Studies show that there is an average increase in interior temperature of 40°F in 30 minutes, meaning if it's 100°F outside, it will be 140°F inside the vehicle, or even hotter, within 30 minutes. And cracking the window made no measurable difference in temperature.
- Although anyone can suffer from heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others so check regularly on infants and young children; people aged 65 and over; and those who have a physical or mental illness.

If you MUST be out in the heat, follow these tips:

- Limit outdoor activity to the coolest parts of the day, morning and evening.
- Avoid or cut down on exercise. If you must exercise or do strenuous work outside, drink 2 – 4 glasses of cool, nonalcoholic fluids each hour. Be sure to drink a beverage, like a sports drink, that will replace the salt and minerals you lose in your sweat.
- Take frequent rest breaks in shady areas or in air-conditioning, if available.
- Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a hat and sunglasses and wear sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher. Be sure to apply the sunscreen at least 30 minutes BEFORE sun exposure, as sunscreen takes 30 minutes to reach full effectiveness. Reapply after swimming, sweating, vigorous activity, or toweling.

For additional information, please reference the DRI Heat Stress Fact Sheet at http://safety.dri.edu/FieldSafety/Guidelines/Heat_Stress_Facts.pdf.

Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heattips.asp
PEDIATRICS Vol. 116 No. 1 July 2005, pp. e109-e112, available online at:
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/116/1/e109>