

Keeping Your Cool - Avoiding Heat Relating Illnesses

Exposure to extreme heat can make a person seriously ill. The likelihood of suffering a heat-related injury depends on factors such as physical activity, clothing, humidity and working conditions. Once the signals of heat-related illness begin to appear, a person's condition can quickly worsen. Heat-related emergencies can result in death if not recognized and treated quickly.



Heat-related injuries can range from a relatively minor to severe illness such as when the body's cooling systems become overwhelmed. The body normally cools itself by sweating but, in some cases, a person's body temperature may rise too quickly. High body temperatures can damage the brain and other vital organs.

HEAT CRAMPS

Symptoms: These are painful muscle cramps, usually in the stomach, arms, or legs that may occur during heavy activity. Heat cramps are the least serious type of heat-related injuries. It can be dangerous to ignore them; they are early-warning signs that the body is having trouble with heat.

Treatment: Move the person to cool place and rest. Give cool water or sports drink. Usually, rest and fluids are all the person needs to recover. Lightly stretch the muscle and gently massage the area. Don't give the person salt tablets or salt water. They can make the situation worse.

HEAT EXHAUSTION

Symptoms: This is the body's response to losing too much water in sweat. It often occurs in people who exercise heavily or work in hot, humid places, which makes them sweat a lot. As the body overheats, blood flow to the skin increases, which decreases blood flow to other organs and causes weakness, confusion, and could cause a person to collapse. If heat exhaustion is not treated, the person may suffer heat stroke. Signals include, cool, moist, pale, ashen or flushed skin, headache, nauseas, dizziness, weakness and exhaustion.

Treatment: Move the person to a cooler environment, loosen or remove clothing, fan the person. Get the person into an air-conditioned building while applying wet towels. If

the person's condition doesn't improve or if you suspect heat stroke, call 9-1-1.

HEAT STROKE

Symptoms: This is the most serious type of heat-related injury and is considered a life-threatening condition. Heat strike occurs when the body systems are overwhelmed by heat and begin to stop functioning because the body is unable to cool itself down. The signals of heat stroke include red shin that can be either dry or moist, changes in consciousness, dizziness, not sweating, rapid or weak pulse and rapid or shallow breathing.

Treatments: Get the person out of the heat and call 9-1-1 immediately. Loosen any tight clothing and apply cool, wet cloths, such as towels or sheets. Spraying the person with water and fanning is also recommended. Give the person small amounts of water to drink if conscious.

Dehydration is a major contributing factor in heat-related injuries. Proper hydration is very important when working outdoors especially when it's hot. Keeping the body hydrated is critical in the prevention of heat-related injuries. It is important to consume plenty of fluids, regardless of thirst. Drink at least 2 to 4 glasses of cool fluid each hour. Water is always the best choice. Avoid ice cold drinks because they can cause stomach cramps and headaches. Also avoid drinks containing caffeine, such as ice tea, colas, and alcohol and salt should be avoided as well.

