

HEAT ILLNESSES

Hot humid weather—particularly a series of hot, humid days—can cause serious illnesses, including heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. While anyone, under certain circumstances, can be affected by these illnesses, some people are in much greater danger and should take extra precautions.

- ✦ Persons in the greatest danger of succumbing to the most serious heat illnesses are: older adults, people with special medical concerns (especially when accompanied by obesity), and those taking certain medications, including psychotropic drugs.
- ✦ Darker skin tone does not prevent against heat illnesses
- ✦ Foremost among heat illnesses are heat cramps, heat exhaustion (or prostration), and, the most serious, heat stroke (or sun stroke)
- ✦ The symptoms described for each of these illnesses serve only as guideposts
- ✦ Some people may exhibit all the symptoms described; others may exhibit only one or two



AVOIDING HEAT ILLNESSES

When in periods of high temperature and humidity, there are things everyone (and, particularly, people at high risk) should do to lessen the chances of heat illnesses:

- ✦ Avoid overexertion, particularly during warmer periods of the day
- ✦ Keep windows shut, and draperies, shades, or blinds drawn during the heat of the day
- ✦ Open windows in the evening or night hours when the air outside is cooler
- ✦ Move to cooler rooms during the heat of the day
- ✦ Drink plenty of fluids
- ✦ Dress in loose-fitting, light-colored clothing
- ✦ Lose weight if you are overweight
- ✦ Eat a little more salt, unless your diet prohibits it



Heat Illnesses



HEAT CRAMPS

Symptoms

Heat cramps occur only in fairly healthy individuals, usually after exercise. They may occur even if outside temperature is less than body temperature.

The symptoms of heat cramps include:

- ✦ Mild nausea
- ✦ Muscle cramps in the abdominal area or extremities
- ✦ Cool, pale skin
- ✦ Perspiration

Treatment

If a person shows symptoms of heat cramps, they should be:

- ✦ Moved to a cooler place
- ✦ Given water or other fluids, and salt
- ✦ Encouraged to rest

Heat cramps can lead to heat exhaustion if left untreated.

WHO IS MORE AT RISK?



HEAT EXHAUSTION

Symptoms

This can occur in both active and sedentary individuals. It happens suddenly, and may be quite brief.

Symptoms of heat exhaustion include:

- ✦ Irritability or change in behavior
- ✦ Low or normal temperature
- ✦ Slightly low blood pressure
- ✦ Rapid, full pulse and heartbeat
- ✦ Rapid breathing
- ✦ Cold, pale skin (may be ashen-grey)
- ✦ Profuse perspiration
- ✦ Dizziness, headache, and weakness
- ✦ Nausea, vomiting
- ✦ Cramps in the abdominal area or in the extremities

Treatment

If a person displays symptoms of heat exhaustion, they should be:

- ✦ Moved to a cooler place immediately
- ✦ Given water or other fluids immediately (there is no need for salt)
- ✦ Encouraged to rest

A doctor should be called. Recovery may be spontaneous, or intravenous fluids may be needed to prevent unconsciousness.

HEAT STROKE

Symptoms

This occurs mostly during heat waves. Patients with chronic illnesses are most vulnerable.

Symptoms of heat stroke include:

- ✦ Agitation, confusion, seizures, lethargy, or unconsciousness (may be first symptoms)
- ✦ High temperature (105 degrees Fahrenheit or higher)
- ✦ High blood pressure initially (shock may follow, resulting in low blood pressure)
- ✦ Rapid pulse and heartbeat
- ✦ Rapid, shallow breathing if person is moving about; slow and deep breathing if the person is still
- ✦ Hot, dry, flushed skin

Treatment

As soon as you recognize the signs of heat stroke, immediate action should be taken:

- ✦ Call a physician immediately
- ✦ Remove patient's clothing
- ✦ If a tub is available, immerse patient in ice water; OR
- ✦ Bring down body temperature with cold compresses, or a cold water shower with massage
- ✦ Replace fluids and sodium only under medical orders

Heat stroke, the most serious of the heat illnesses, can lead to death if left untreated.