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# Overheating Prevention

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## Exposure to Extreme Heat Can Harm You

**H**eat exposure can be deadly to the elderly, the young, and those who suffer from chronic diseases like heart failure. Heat exposure caused 8,015 deaths in the United States from 1979 to 2003.

## How Heat Can Affect Us

When the humidity is high, sweat won't evaporate as quickly, which keeps your body from releasing heat as fast as it may need to.

Other factors such as age, obesity, fever, dehydration, heart disease, mental illness, poor circulation, sunburn, and prescription drug and alcohol use can play a role in whether a person can cool off enough in very hot weather.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following:

- Stay cool indoors.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Replace salt and minerals.
- Wear appropriate clothing and sunscreen.
- Schedule outdoor activities carefully.
- Pace yourself.
- Use a buddy system.



## Signs and Symptoms of Heat Stroke

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F)
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea

## Heat Stress in the Elderly

Elderly people (that is, people aged 65 years and older) are more prone to heat stress than younger people for several reasons because they do not adjust as well as young people to sudden changes in temperature. They are also more likely to have a chronic medical condition that changes normal body responses to heat. In addition, they are more likely to take prescription medications that impair the body's ability to regulate its temperature or that inhibit perspiration.

## Heat Stroke

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature: the body's temperature rises rapidly, the body loses its ability to sweat, and it is unable to cool down. Body temperatures rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

*Licensed Medicare and Medicaid agency by the State of Texas.*

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## What is Heat Exhaustion?

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids.

Warning signs may include:

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting
- Skin: cool or moist
- Pulse rate: fast & weak
- Breathing: fast & shallow

## How Can you Protect Yourself in the Heat?

You can follow these prevention tips to protect yourself from heat-related stress:

- Drink cool, nonalcoholic beverages. (If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask him how much you should drink when the weather is hot.)
- Avoid extremely cold liquids
- Rest and remain inside
- Take a cool shower or bath
- Seek air conditioning
- Do not engage in strenuous activities.

## What You Can Do to Help Protect Elderly Relatives and Neighbors

If you have elderly relatives or neighbors, you can help them protect themselves from heat-related stress:

- Visit older adults at risk at least twice a day and watch them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Encourage them to increase their fluid intake by drinking cool, nonalcoholic beverages regardless of their activity level.

Warning: If their doctor generally limits the amount of fluid they drink or they are on water pills, they will need to ask their doctor how much they should drink while the weather is hot.

- Take them to air-conditioned locations if they have transportation problems.

## What You Can Do for Someone with Heat Stress

If you see any signs of severe heat stress, you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the affected person.

Do the following:

- Get the person to a shady area.
- Cool the person rapidly, using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse the person in a tub of cool water; place the person in a cool shower; spray the person with cool water from a garden hose; sponge the person with cool water; or if the humidity is low, wrap the person in a cool, wet sheet and fan him or her vigorously.
- Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101°–102°F
- If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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