

Heat Stress

Prepare to Beat the Heat!

Summer brings along with it higher temperatures and sometimes higher humidity. Make sure you have the information needed to cope with the summertime heat. Remember, you become more vulnerable to heat-related illnesses during extremely hot weather and those who don't take precautions could suffer heat rashes, heat cramps, fainting, heat exhaustion or heat stroke. In severe cases, excessive heat can be more than uncomfortable -- it can be life threatening.

Heat stress occurs when the body is unable to rid itself of excess heat either by sweating or by increasing skin temperature by increasing blood circulation. Heat stress potential is environmentally linked, increasing when air temperature and humidity are high, and when air movement is still. Heat stress can be reduced in a variety of ways. Experts suggest the following guidelines to minimize and prevent heat-related disorders:

- **Drink plenty of water** - while being exposed to hot environments. About one cup of cool water every 15-20 minutes, even if you are not thirsty. Avoid alcohol, coffee, tea, and caffeinated soft drinks. They contribute to dehydration.
- **Wear lightweight, loose-fitting, light-colored clothing** - to allow fresh air to reach your skin's surface. Don't allow your clothing to become completely saturated.
- **Adjust slowly to recreation or work in hot environments** - with lighter workload and longer rest periods for the first few days of intense heat. And this process needs to start all over again when you return from vacation or absence due to illness or injury.
- **Maintain good ventilation** - when in high heat areas. Good air flow increases evaporation and cooling of the skin. Stagnant atmospheric conditions and poor air quality can induce heat-related illnesses.
- **Alternate work and rest periods** - with rest periods in a cooler area. Shorter, but more frequent, work-rest cycles are best in hot weather. Schedule heavy work for cooler parts of the day and use appropriate protective clothing.
- **Minimize exposure to heat or direct sunlight** - if possible. Consider your physical condition when work is required in hot environments. Avoid hot surfaces during extreme heat conditions, such as parking lot pavement, building rooftops, enclosed areas with heat producing equipment, etc. Obesity, lack of conditioning, pregnancy and inadequate rest can increase susceptibility to heat stress.
- **Recognize heat stress symptoms** - to detect early signs of heat-related illness and take precautionary and preventative measures.
- **Learn to spot the signs of heat stroke** - which can be fatal. The symptoms are severe headache, mental confusion/loss of consciousness, flushed face, and hot, dry skin. If someone has stopped sweating, seek medical attention immediately.