



Coping with the Heat

Exposure to intense heat, sun, and high humidity can cause heat-related illnesses, such as heat exhaustion, heat cramps, and heat stroke (also known as sun stroke). As the body works to cool itself under extreme or prolonged heat, blood rushes to the surface of your skin. As a result, less blood reaches your brain, muscles, and other organs. This can interfere with both your physical strength and your mental functions, leading, in some cases, to serious danger.

During extremely hot weather, precautions should be taken to avoid heat-related complications. Those who take certain medications for high blood pressure, depression, or allergy are at greater risk. Use common sense as you go about your daily routine. Eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids; at least 8 to 10 tall glasses of liquid each day. You should be drinking enough fluid that your urine is clear or pale yellow. Avoid prolonged outdoor activities such as hard labor, jogging, tennis, racquetball, etc. If you feel you must exercise, swimming is recommended. Remember, if you must do heavy activity, such as "move-in" day on campus, take regular breaks in a cool place. Dress in lightweight, well-ventilated clothing, and wear a wide-brimmed hat. Use sunscreen to prevent sunburn, which can hinder the skin's ability to cool itself. It is important to avoid alcohol and caffeine, which cause dehydration. Clear liquids are best - preferably water. Other good choices include lemonade and juices.

Heat cramps

Heat cramp symptoms include:

- Severe, sometimes disabling, cramps that typically begin suddenly in the hands, calves or feet.
- Hard, tense muscles.
- Heat cramps can usually be alleviated by escaping the heat, drinking salty beverages, and eating salty foods. Gentle massage or firm pressure applied to cramping muscles can alleviate spasms. In severe cases, the victim may need intravenous fluids and salts. If your heat cramps do not go away, call Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2714, for advice.

Heat exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a condition brought on when the body's temperature control system is overloaded. The body normally cools itself by sweating, but sometimes sweating is not enough.

Signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion are:

- Gradual fatigue and weakness
- Anxiety and nausea
- Profuse sweating with cold, clammy skin
- Pale color

- Dizziness, headache, blurred vision

- Muscle cramps
- Fainting
- Increased pulse rate

To treat heat exhaustion:

- Go to a cool or shady area.
- Lie down flat or with head slightly elevated.
- Remove excess clothing.
- Drink small amounts of water every few minutes. Sports drinks (with less than 6% glucose) help replace the salt which has been lost. NO alcohol or caffeine. Plain water with 1 teaspoon salt added per quart.
- Place a bag of ice or cool cloth on forehead, back of neck, groin, and under armpits. Do not use an alcohol pad.
- Allow adequate time to rest.
- Avoid heavy activity for the rest of the day.

For further assistance, call the Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700.

Heat stroke

Heat stroke is a more serious condition in which the body fails at regulating its own temperature. This condition happens abruptly and is considered an emergency.

Signs and symptoms of heat stroke are:

- Headache, dizziness
- Absence of sweating (although the skin may be moist from earlier sweating or from sponging with water)
- Hot, red and dry skin
- Elevated temperature
- Unconsciousness or markedly abnormal mental status
- Seizures

If any of these symptoms are present:

- Call 9-911(campus phone) or 911 (non-campus phone) for emergency assistance as soon as possible.
- Place the person in a shady or air-conditioned area.
- Remove excess clothing.
- Place in a cool bath if person conscious and someone in constant attendance. Alternatively, sponge skin with cool water. Place a bag of ice or cool cloth on forehead, back of neck, groin, and under armpits. DO NOT use an alcohol rub.
- Sponge with cool water.
- If the person is conscious and alert, offer sips of liquids.
- Wait for emergency help to arrive. If unconscious or confused, do not give fluids because of danger of choking.

Call 9-911 (campus phone) or 911 (non- campus phone)

References

Emedicine Web site, search for heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat stroke
WebMD Web site, search for heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat stroke

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: <http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu>