

FactSheet

Para Su Información

Recognizing and Treating Heat-Related Illnesses

Even short periods in high temperatures can cause health problems that range from minor to life threatening. It is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness in order to ensure proper treatment.

Sunburn

Sunburn should be avoided because it is damaging to the skin. While the discomfort is usually minor and healing occurs in about a week, some sunburns can be more severe and require medical attention.

Symptoms

Skin becomes red, painful and abnormally warm after sun exposure.

Treatment

Consult a doctor if an infant under 1 year of age is sunburned or has the following symptoms: fever, fluid-filled blisters and/or severe pain.

Tips for treating sunburn:

- Avoid repeated sun exposure.
- Apply cool compresses or immerse the affected area in cool water.
- Apply moisturizing lotion to affected areas. Do not use salve, butter or ointment.
- Do not break blisters.
- Do not apply ice.

Heat Rash

Heat rash is a skin irritation caused by excessive sweating during hot, humid weather. It can occur at any age but is most common in young children.

Symptoms

Heat rash looks like a red cluster of pimples or small blisters. It is more likely to occur on the neck and upper chest, in the groin, under breasts, and in elbow creases and other skin folds.

Treatment

The best treatment is to provide a cooler, less humid environment. Keep the affected area dry. Dusting powder may be used to increase comfort, but avoid using ointments or creams as they keep the skin warm and moist and may make the condition worse.

Treating heat rash is simple and usually does not require medical assistance.

Heat Cramps

Usually heat cramps affect people who sweat a lot during strenuous activity. When the body is depleted of salt and moisture, the low salt level in the muscles causes painful cramps. Heat cramps may also be a symptom of heat exhaustion.

Symptoms

Heat cramps are muscle pains or spasms that usually occur in the abdomen, arms, or legs, which may occur in association with strenuous activity.

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Treatment

- If you have a heart problem or are on a low sodium diet, seek medical attention.
- Stop all activity and rest in a cool, shaded area.
- Do not return to the strenuous activity for a few hours after the cramps subside, further exertion may lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Seek medical attention for heat cramps that do not subside within one hour.
- Drink fluids such as water, fruit juices and sports drinks to rehydrate and replace salt and mineral levels.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is the body's response to an excessive loss of water and salt contained in sweat. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are the elderly, people with high blood pressure and people working or exercising in a hot environment.

Symptoms

Warning signs of heat exhaustion include: heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting and fainting.

The skin may feel cool and moist. The victim's pulse rate will be fast and weak, and breathing will be fast and shallow. If untreated, heat exhaustion may progress to heat stroke. Seek medical attention immediately.

Treatment

Cooling measures that may be effective include:

- Cool, non-alcoholic beverages, as directed by your doctor
- Rest
- A cool shower, bath, or sponge bath
- An air-conditioned environment
- Lightweight clothing

Heat Stroke

When heat stroke occurs the body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down and body temperature may rise to 106°F or higher. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not given.

Symptoms

Warning signs of heat stroke vary but may include: a body temperature above 103°F; red, hot and dry skin (no sweating); rapid, strong pulse; throbbing headache; dizziness; nausea; confusion and unconsciousness.

Treatment

Heat stroke can be a life-threatening emergency. Immediately begin cooling the victim and call for medical assistance.

- Get the victim to a shady area.
- Rapidly cool the victim using whatever methods are available:
 - Wrap in a cool, wet sheet and fan vigorously.
 - Spray or sponge with cool water and fan.
 - Immerse in a tub of cool shallow water only if awake and alert.
 - Place in a cool shower.
- Monitor body temperature, and continue cooling until the victim's temperature drops to 101-102°F.
- If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call a hospital emergency department for further instructions.
- **Do not give fluids!**



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