

BEAT THE HEAT

Heat exhaustion can occur when body fluids are lost through sweating. While sweat is the primary means of controlling body temperature, the loss of fluids, if they are not replaced, can create a true medical emergency that acts a lot like shock. Excessive sweating leads to dehydration, which decreases the fluid volume of the bloodstream, which leads to critical body systems not getting enough oxygen.

Heat exhaustion symptoms include:

- Often pale with cool, moist skin
- Sweating profusely
- Muscle cramps or pains
- Feeling faint or dizzy
- Headache, weakness, thirst, and nausea
- Elevated core body temperature—often higher than 100°F
- Rapid pulse

Heat stroke is life-threatening, and is often the result of uncontrolled heat exhaustion. With all fluids expended, the body can no longer cool itself, and without rapid emergency intervention, a victim's core body temperature will quickly rise to the point where critical body systems—including the brain—sustain permanent, often fatal, damage. We're talking minutes here for an otherwise healthy person. For people on certain types of medications, the effects are magnified.

Heat stroke symptoms include:

- Unconsciousness or markedly abnormal mental status (dizziness, confusion, hallucinations, or coma)
- Flushed, hot, and dry skin (although it may be moist initially from previous sweating or from attempts to cool the person with water)
- May be hyperventilating
- Core temperature of 105°F or more

When in doubt, call an ambulance right away.

The secret to preventing heat-related emergencies is to drink lots of non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic liquids. How do you know if you're drinking enough? At the risk of being indelicate, the key is the color of your urine. During the warmer months in particular, when the risks of heat-related emergencies are elevated, your urine should be clear. The yellower it is, the more you need fluids.

Drink plenty of fluids this summer. Watch out for each other.

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