

Too Hot for Your Health?

It has been a scorcher the past week to say the least. The cooler temperatures this week will certainly be a welcome relief. However, we've just passed the Summer Solstice which means the official start of summer has begun. More hot days are on the way!

A priority in the summer months is not becoming overheated. Too much heat is not safe for anyone. It's even riskier for older adults or if health problems are an issue.

Getting relief from the heat quickly is important. Initial symptoms of heat stress can include feelings of confusion or faintness. Being hot for too long can cause several other illnesses under the umbrella of hyperthermia.

The National Institute on Aging offers these definitions for different levels of heat stress along with recommendations should related symptoms occur.

A sudden dizziness can happen while a person is active during hot weather. This is known as heat syncope. If a beta blocker type heart medication is being taken at the time or you are not used to being in the heat, you are more likely to feel faint. Resting, putting your legs up and drinking water should make the dizziness go away.

Heat cramps are common – a painful tightening of muscles in the stomach, arms or legs. Cramps may accompany a high level of activity. The skin may feel moist and cool with the body temperature and pulse remaining normal. Find a way to cool down, drink plenty of fluids avoiding those with alcohol or caffeine.

Swelling in the ankles and feet when you're hot is a symptom of heat edema. Put your legs up to help reduce the swelling. If that doesn't work fairly quickly, check with your doctor.

Heat exhaustion is a clear warning that your body is no longer able to keep itself cool. You could feel thirsty, dizzy, weak, uncoordinated and nauseated. There may be a lot of sweating involved. Body temperature may remain normal, but the skin may feel cold and clammy. The pulse will likely be rapid. Again, rest in a cool place and drink plenty of fluids. If you don't feel better soon, get medical care. If not careful, heat exhaustion can progress to heat stroke.

Heat stroke is a medical emergency. Medical help is needed right away. Those who are dehydrated or may be dealing with chronic disease or alcoholism are at most risk. Signs of heat stroke include: Fainting (may be the first sign); becoming unconscious; a change in behavior (confusion, agitation, staggering), body temperature over 104 degrees F; dry, flushed skin and rapid pulse or slow pulse; and not sweating even if it's hot.

Each year, most people who die from hyperthermia are over 50 years of age. Health problems and some drugs taken for chronic disease can contribute to hyperthermia. Being overweight or underweight can also be an issue.

Older adults can have a tough time dealing with heat and humidity. The temperature outside does not have to reach 100 degrees F to put them at risk for heat-related stress.

Pay attention to the temperature and humidity reports as we head into summer. Be safe, drink plenty of fluids, and keep cool!

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