



When temperatures hover above the average high temperature, even short periods of extreme heat can cause serious health problems. Here are their signs and some tips to cope:

## Heat Stroke

Heat stroke occurs when the body is unable to regulate its temperature. The body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. Body temperature may rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided. Its warning signs vary but may include:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F, orally)
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Unconsciousness

Any of these signs could mean you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the victim rapidly using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse the victim in a tub of cool water; place the person in a cool shower; spray the victim with cool water from a garden hose; sponge the person with cool water; or if the humidity is low, wrap the victim in a cool, wet sheet and fan him or her vigorously.

Also:

- Monitor body temperature, and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101-102°F.
- If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions.
- Do not give the victim fluids to drink.
- Get medical assistance as soon as possible.

Sometimes a victim's muscles twitch uncontrollably as a result of heat stroke. If this happens, keep the victim from injuring himself, but do not place any object in the mouth and do not give fluids. If there is vomiting, make sure the airway remains open by turning the victim on his or her side.

## Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. It is the body's response to an excessive loss of the water and salt contained in sweat. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are elderly people, people with high blood pressure, and people working or exercising in a hot environment. Warning signs of heat exhaustion include:

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting

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

immediately if symptoms are severe or if the victim has heart problems or high blood pressure. Otherwise, help the victim to cool off, and seek medical attention if symptoms worsen or last longer than one hour. Cooling measures that may be effective include:

- Cool, nonalcoholic beverages, as directed by a physician
- Rest
- Cool shower, bath, or sponge bath
- An air-conditioned environment
- Lightweight clothing

## Heat Cramps

Heat cramps usually affect people who sweat a lot during strenuous activity. This sweating depletes the body's salt and moisture. The low salt level in the muscles causes painful cramps. Heat cramps may also be a symptom of heat exhaustion. Heat cramps are muscle pains or spasms—usually in the abdomen, arms, or legs—that may occur in association with strenuous activity. If you have heart problems or are on a low-sodium diet, get medical attention for heat cramps.

If medical attention is not necessary, take these steps:

- Stop all activity, and sit quietly in a cool place.
- Drink clear juice or a sports beverage.
- Do not return to strenuous activity for a few hours after the cramps subside, because further exertion may lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Seek medical attention for heat cramps if they do not subside in 1 hour.

## 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. 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 the breasts, and in elbow creases.

The best treatment for heat rash 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—they keep the skin warm and moist and may make the condition worse.

## Sunburn

Sunburn should be avoided because it damages the skin. Although the discomfort is usually minor and healing often occurs in about a week, a more severe sunburn may require medical attention.

Symptoms of sunburn are well known: the skin becomes red, painful, and abnormally warm after sun exposure.

### *What to Do*

Consult a doctor if the sunburn affects an infant younger than 1 year of age or if fever, fluid-filled blisters or severe pain are present.

Also, remember these tips when treating sunburn:

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

**For more information, call 817-321-4700 or visit our Web site:**

**<http://health.tarrantcounty.com>**