

HEAT AND EXERCISE: KEEPING COOL IN HOT WEATHER



(Photo: Corbis)

Whether you're running, playing a pickup game of basketball or going for a power walk, take care when temperature rises. If you exercise outdoors in hot weather, use these commonsense precautions to prevent heat-related illnesses.

How heat affects your body:

Exercising in hot weather puts extra stress on your body. If you don't take care when exercising in the heat, you risk serious illness. Both the exercise itself and the air temperature and humidity can increase your core body temperature.

To help cool itself, your body sends more blood to circulate through your skin. This leaves less blood for your muscles, which in turn increases your heart rate. If the humidity also is high, your body faces added stress because sweat doesn't readily evaporate from your skin. That pushes your body temperature even higher.

Under normal conditions, your skin, blood vessels and perspiration level adjust to the heat. But these natural cooling systems may fail if you're exposed to high temperatures and humidity for too long, you sweat heavily, and you don't drink enough fluids.

The result may be a heat-related illness. Heat-related illnesses occur along a spectrum, starting out mild but worsening if left untreated.

Heat related illnesses:

- Heat cramps
- Heat syncope and exercise-associated collapse
- Heat exhaustion
- Heatstroke

Pay attention to warning signs:

- Muscle cramps
- Nausea or vomiting
- Weakness
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Excessive sweating

- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Confusion
- Irritability
- Low blood pressure
- Increased heart rate
- Visual problems

How to avoid heat-related illness:

- Watch the temperature
- Get acclimated
- Know your fitness level

- Drink plenty of fluids
- Dress appropriately
- Avoid midday sun
- Wear sunscreen

- Have a backup plan
- Understand your medical risks

Sources: Mayo Clinic