

November 2008: Heat Stress

what is heat stress?

Heat stress occurs when your body is **unable to cool itself enough to maintain a healthy temperature**. Normally, the body cools itself by sweating, however sometimes sweating isn't enough and the body temperature keeps rising!

causes of heat stress...

There are many factors which can cause heat stress and heat-related illness; these can either be **internal or external factors** including:

- 1. Dehydration** – to keep healthy, our **body temperature needs to stay around 37°C**. The body cools itself by sweating, which normally accounts for 70 – 80% of the body's heat loss. If a person becomes dehydrated, they don't sweat as much and their body temperature continues to rise.
- 2. Lack of airflow** – working in hot, poorly ventilated or confined areas.
- 3. Sun exposure** – especially on hot days, between 11am and 3pm.
- 4. Hot and crowded conditions** – people attending large events (concerts, dance parties or sporting events) in hot or crowded conditions may also experience heat stress which can result in illness.
- 5. Bushfires** – exposure to radiant heat from bushfires can cause rapid dehydration and heat-related illness. Bushfires usually occur when the temperature is high, which adds to the risk.

how does heat stress affect you?

The most common heat related conditions are:

Heat Rash – sometimes called 'prickly heat', this is a skin irritation caused by excessive sweating. It can occur at any age, but is most common in young children. It looks like a red cluster of pimples or small blisters. It is most likely to occur on the neck and upper chest, in the groin, under the breasts and in the elbow creases.

Heat Cramps – which usually occur after heavy sweating and is associated with excessive loss of salt from the body.

Heat Exhaustion – profuse sweating, weakness, rapid pulse, dizziness, headache and nausea.

Heat Stroke – a very serious condition which causes hot dry skin, chills, confusion, breathing fast and shallow, weak and slow pulse rate.

how can I avoid heat stress?

Prevention is the best way to manage heat-related illness.

Some tips to prevent heat stress include:

- **Keep up your fluids** – you need to drink more during hot weather, regardless of how active you are. Do not wait until you are thirsty to drink. Drink plenty of water or other cool, non-alcoholic fluids. Limit alcohol or drinks that contain lots of sugar. Don't have extremely cold liquids, as they may cause stomach cramps.
- **Avoid exposure to heat** – stay out of the sun as much as you can.
- **Protect yourself outside** – remember to protect yourself from the sun ('slip, slop, slap') by covering exposed skin with lightweight clothes, using sunscreen and wearing a hat.
- **Limit physical activity** – too much physical activity on a hot day can lead to heat stress. If you can, restrict activity to cooler parts of the day.
- **Don't leave children or pets in cars** – even on cool days, cars can heat up to dangerous temperatures very quickly. Never leave children or pets in a parked car or they will be at risk of serious heat-related illnesses and possibly death.
- **Take it easy** – rest often and, whenever possible, stay indoors or in the shade.
- **Stay cool** – and keep air circulating around you. Use air-conditioning if possible. Take a cool shower, bath or sponge bath.
- **Keep up your energy levels** – eat regular, light meals.
- **Watch out for others** – check on older, sick or frail people who may need help coping with the heat.

heat stress first aid

Treatment options vary according to the type of heat-related illness. Apply first aid and seek medical assistance immediately if you, or someone you are with, shows any sign of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

are you drinking enough water?

In general, the darker the colour of your urine, the more dehydrated you are so keep an eye on your hydration levels during the day.

Remember, if you are thirsty, you are already dehydrated!!