Three Faces of Heat Stress



WHAT'S AT STAKE
Heat, whether from the sun or from your work environment, can create a life-threatening emergency.

WHAT'S THE DANGER
Heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke are the three main types of illness which result from working on hot and humid conditions.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF
Heat cramps are painful but not life-threatening: They most often occur in the leg and stomach muscles, and are caused by an imbalance of water and salt in the body. Water, rest and a lightly salted snack will help.

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Heat exhaustion is more serious: It can be caused by either too little water or loss of salt through sweat. The first symptoms are dizziness, sweating, headache, weakness, tiredness and nausea. As this condition progresses, symptoms are reduced mental alertness, blurred vision, pale and wet skin and shallow rapid breathing.

If someone is suffering from heat exhaustion:

- Move the person to a cooler place.
- Loosen restrictive clothing.
- If the victim is conscious, have him drink a solution of one teaspoon of salt per pint of water.
- Lay the victim down.
- Raise the person's feet and legs slightly higher than his head.
- Fan the victim.
- Sponge with lukewarm water to encourage heat loss but don't chill the victim.
- Call for medical help.

Heat stroke is serious: Heat stroke is a life-threatening medical emergency. The body has lost its ability to sweat and the inner temperature has risen dangerously. The symptoms are similar to heat exhaustion but the skin will be hot and dry, and breathing will be deep and fast as if the victim has been running. He or she might complain that the muscles feel as if they are on fire.

The person may collapse with little or no warning.

If someone is suffering from heat stroke:

- Call for medical assistance immediately.
- If the person is not breathing and you are properly trained, begin rescue breathing procedures.
- It is important to lower the inner body temperature rapidly because damage to the brain, kidneys and heart can occur. Remove the person’s clothing and cover with a wet blanket or spray gently with water. Fan the person to increase heat loss.

These tips can help prevent heat stress in any form:

- Drink plenty of water or one of the commercially prepared drinks designed to replace fluids and minerals.
- Take rest breaks in a cooler area.
- Eat light, cool meals.
- Dress lightly, in layers, so that you can adjust as the temperature changes.
- Gradually get used to working in the heat.

FINAL WORD
Heat illness can be serious, even fatal. Take it easy when you work in hot conditions!
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