

Extreme heat is defined as temperatures that hover 10 degrees or more above the average high temperature for the region and last for several weeks. High humidity can make the high temperatures even more uncomfortable.

Several factors affect the body's ability to cool itself during extremely hot weather. The body normally cools itself by sweating. When the humidity is high, sweat won't evaporate as quickly, preventing the body from releasing heat quickly. In some cases, sweating isn't enough and a person's body temperature can rise rapidly. Other factors that may increase a person's risk are:

- Age
- Obesity
- Fever
- Dehydration
- Heart disease
- Mental illness
- Poor circulation
- Sunburn
- Prescription drug and alcohol use

During Hot Weather

The best defense against heat related health emergencies is prevention. To protect your health, remember to keep cool and use common sense.

Drink Plenty of Fluids

Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink. You will need to increase your fluid intake regardless of your activity level during hot weather. Don't drink fluids that contain caffeine, alcohol or large amounts of sugar. These actually cause you to lose more body fluid. Also avoid very cold drinks because they can cause stomach cramps. **Warning -**

If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask him how much you should drink while the weather is hot.

Replace Salt and Minerals

Heavy sweating removes salt and minerals from the body. If you must exercise, drink two to four glasses of cool, non-alcoholic fluids each hour. Sports beverages can replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat, but if you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage or talking salt tablets.

Wear Appropriate Clothing and Use Sunscreen

Wear lightweight, light colored, loose fitting clothing. Light colors will reflect away some of the sun's energy. Sunburn affects your body's ability to cool itself and damages the skin. If you must be out in the sun, wear a wide brimmed hat, sunglasses, and apply a sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher (look for "broad spectrum" or "UVA/UVB protection" on the label) 30 minutes prior to going out.

Schedule Outdoor Activities Carefully and Pace Yourself

Limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours when it's cooler. Try to rest often in shady areas. If you're not used to working or exercising in a hot environment, start slowly and pick up the pace gradually. If the activity makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, STOP! Get to a cool area and rest, especially if you become lightheaded, confused, weak or faint.

Extreme Heat Fact Sheet – page 2

Stay Cool Indoors

Stay indoors and, if at all possible, stay in an air-conditioned place. If your home doesn't have air conditioning, go to a mall, library, movie theater or other public facility. Even a few hours in air conditioning can help your body stay cooler when you go back out into the heat.

Electric fans may provide comfort, but when the temperature is in the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat-related illness. Taking a cool shower or bath is also a good way to cool off.

Monitor Those at High Risk

Although anyone can suffer from heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others:

- Infants and children up to four years of age are sensitive to the effects of high temperatures. They rely on others to provide them enough liquids and monitor their environment.
- People over 65 years of age are less likely to sense and respond to change in temperature.
- People who are overweight may be prone to heat sickness because of their tendency to retain more body heat.
- People who overdo it during work or exercise may become dehydrated and susceptible to heat sickness.
- People who are physically ill, especially with heart disease or high blood pressure, or who take certain medications for depression, insomnia or poor circulation may be affected by extreme heat.
- People who have a mental illness

Use Common Sense

- Avoid hot foods and heavy meals – they add heat to your body.

- Dress infants and children in cool, loose fitting clothing and shade their heads and faces with hats or an umbrella.
- Limit sun exposure during mid-day hours and in places of potential severe exposure such as beaches.
- **DO NOT** leave infants, children or pets in a parked car! When left in a hot car, a young child's core body temperature can rise three to five times faster than that of an adult, causing permanent injury or even death. Research shows that on a 95-degree day the temperature within a small car can exceed 122 degrees within 20 minutes and 150 degrees within 40 minutes. It also shows that even when outdoor temperatures are as low as 60-degrees a car can heat to dangerous levels.

Additional Resources

For more information on extreme heat:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Emergency Preparedness & Response
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/>
- American Red Cross
www.redcross.org