



Heat Illnesses

Your body has a pretty amazing built-in thermostat. When you're too hot, it normally cools you down by sweating. But sometimes your body's temperature rises too high or too fast—in a heat wave, after intense exercise, or when you're surrounded by swarms of people, for example.

What then? This puts you at risk for heat illnesses, especially if you're over 65, a young child, or overweight, or if you have a chronic condition such as diabetes or cancer. Certain medications can also increase your risk.

Feeling too hot to handle? Be cool—no need to panic.

Some heat illnesses are minor annoyances. Skin rashes or leg swelling from sitting or standing for long periods in extreme heat are two examples. Getting out of the sun or moving around may easily resolve these problems.

During intense exercise, muscle pain or spasms—in arms, legs, or abdomen—may occur from losing too much water and salt. Or, becoming dehydrated or exercising without a cool-down could cause you to faint if you stand up suddenly.

You know you're headed into "hot water", though, if you have signs of heat exhaustion such as cool, moist, pale, flushed, or red skin; headache; nausea; dizziness; or weakness. Heavy sweating, rapid breathing, or a fast, weak pulse are other signs to watch for. It's important to treat these symptoms right away. Otherwise, fluid loss can reduce blood flow to vital organs and cause shock.

To treat faintness, or heat cramps or exhaustion—rest and remove or loosen tight clothing. Apply cool, wet cloths. Drink small amounts of cool water or sports drinks every 15 minutes. Gently stretch or massage cramped muscles.⁵ Call your doctor if you're not better within 30 minutes.

But what if your thermostat completely fails you? This is a heatstroke. Your body temperature rises quickly—as high as 106 degrees F. It's a life-threatening condition that can cause brain damage—even death. You may have hot, red, dry skin (although sweating may continue); a rapid, strong pulse; dizziness; vomiting; fever; rapid, shallow breathing; and confusion, seizure, or loss of consciousness.

Heatstroke is an emergency—call 9-1-1. Move the person to a cooler place, but keep him or her still. Wrap the body in wet sheets and put ice packs on wrists, ankles, armpits, and neck. As always, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

To avoid heat illness:

- Wear a hat and lightweight, light-colored clothing.
- Drink even if you don't feel thirsty. Avoid very cold drinks that might cause cramping and those that dehydrate you, such as alcohol, caffeine, or sugary drinks.
- Be active during cooler parts of the day. As much as possible, stay indoors when it's in the 80s or hotter.
- Take regular breaks when exercising.
- During heat waves, take cool baths or use air conditioning. Or go to a mall or public library where it is cool.
- Never leave anyone in a closed, parked vehicle.
- If you have a chronic medical condition, ask your doctor or me about how to handle medications and any extra fluids.



If you have any questions please feel free to contact me @ 873-3244 or mcglynnrx@tds.net

Thanks, Dan McGlynn