



Stay Hydrated on Hot Summer Days

We assume that our thirst mechanism will protect us from dehydration. That if we become dehydrated, it will tell us by triggering intense thirst until we are properly hydrated. But this isn't always the case. It is possible to lose fluid so quickly that the normal thirst mechanism is overwhelmed or overridden. The rate of loss will vary according to activity levels, air temperature, humidity and altitude.

PERSPIRATION: With normal daily activities we do not sweat very hard so loss is minimal -- about one to two liters per day. But with exertion in hot, dry weather, loss through sweating can become extreme. During heavy exertion, we can lose one to three liters of water per hour, which can easily amount to 8-10 liters of fluid over an afternoon of exercise.

HEAT EXHAUSTION is not a life-threatening illness. Little or no rise in body core temperature will be noted. With enough rest and water, heat exhaustion is self-correcting.

HEAT STROKE is a life-threatening emergency. Without proper care, heat stroke victims will most likely die. Once our cooling mechanism fails, core temperature rises rapidly. Death

can occur in as little as 30 minutes. When the core temperature rises, the brain, which can only function in a very narrow temperature range, begins to fail.

As the brain overheats, the individual may become disoriented, combative, argumentative, and may hallucinate wildly. The primary goal is to cool the victim as rapidly as possible. The simplest and most effective method is to remove all non-cotton clothing and soak the victim with water, fanning to increase the rate of evaporation, and massaging extremities to encourage the return of cool blood to the core.

With a limited supply of water, cooling the head and neck becomes the top priority. If available, ice packs should be placed at the neck, armpits and groin, in that order. All heat stroke victims must be transported to the hospital as quickly as possible, continuing the cooling process during evacuation.

PREVENTION: Heat stroke, like all heat-related illnesses, is preventable. The same prevention methods that work for dehydration and exhaustion will work for heat stroke. The guiding principle is to stay well

Combating Heat Rules of Thumb

1. Stay well hydrated and eat salty snacks.
2. Rest often, out of the sun.
3. Wear clothing that allows evaporation and a brimmed hat or cap.
4. Give heat exhaustion patients lots of water with a teaspoon of salt per liter. Let them rest.
5. Cool heat stroke patients as rapidly as possible. Douse with water, fan, and massage extremities. Evacuate as soon as possible.
6. Drink water because you know you should, not because you feel thirsty.

hydrated. Do not rely on your thirst mechanism to tell you when and how much you need to drink. Under conditions of exertion, it is probably impossible to drink too much water.