

Dangers of Overdoing it in the Summer Heat

(ARA) - With longer days, warmer temperatures, and an abundance of sunshine, it's no wonder so many of us take to the outdoors for summertime fun. While it feels great to be outside for recreational activities and exercise in the summer, too much exertion can lead to serious health problems.

"When the temperature soars and humidity rises, it is time to take precautions to avoid dangerous health consequences such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke and overexposure to the sun," says Dr. Sean Robinson, assistant professor of education at Argosy University/Washington DC and ACE-certified personal trainer.

Seniors, children, and people with chronic illnesses are most susceptible to heat exhaustion and stroke, however, everyone is at risk. Many tell-tale symptoms and warning signs are associated with heat exhaustion, including dry mouth, fatigue, dizziness, headache, weak and rapid pulse, and cool, clammy, pale skin. And many of these symptoms take several hours to appear.

"The early symptoms of heat exhaustion can sneak up on us," explains Dr. Robinson. "Some people feel a bit light-headed and weak, and might have a touch of nausea. The serious problems develop when symptoms are ignored and additional fluids are not taken right away." Dehydration - and the resulting loss of electrolytes such as sodium - is the primary cause of heat exhaustion. Dr. Robinson advises people to stay well-hydrated and take in extra salt. "Drink even though you don't feel like it - you can't count on your thirst mechanism to prompt you."

Heat stroke is the most severe form of heat illness and is a life-threatening emergency. It is the result of long, extreme exposure to the sun, in which a person does not sweat enough to lower body temperature, reaching over 103 degrees. People suffering from heat stroke may experience extremely serious medical conditions, including hot, dry, red skin; no sweating at all; disorientation, hallucinations, or delirium; convulsions; and a loss of consciousness.

"Heat stroke can occur within 10 to 15 minutes of the first symptoms. If treatment is not given immediately, permanent damage can occur to internal organs," says Dr. Robinson. He also emphasizes that heat stroke is a medical emergency. "Call 911 or transport the victim immediately to a hospital." While waiting for medical help, Dr. Robinson advises that an attendee to a heat stroke victim should move him or her to a cool place indoors and lower the body temperature by wrapping the victim in wet sheets, wet clothing or ice packs.

Summer is always a great season to enjoy and be physically active in the fine weather and outdoor opportunities. Knowing the signs of heat exhaustion and heat stroke, and what to do when one is exposed to these conditions, will help keep you, your family and friends healthy and safe during the dog days of summer.

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