

CHANGE YOUR PACE:

WHEN TEMPERATURES CLIMB, PROTECT YOURSELF FROM EXTREME HEAT

If you exercise outdoors or do strenuous labour, you are especially vulnerable to heat illnesses during very hot weather. This fact sheet provides information about how you can be safe and active through the hot summer months.

Being physically active provides many health benefits, but it can also put you at risk during extremely hot weather. If you are physically active and are also taking a medication or have a health condition, ask your doctor if it increases your health risk in the heat, and follow their recommendations. Your risk of suffering a heat illness can increase in hot weather if:

You have breathing difficulties

You have heart problems

You have mental illness, such as depression

You suffer from hypertension

You suffer from kidney problems

Heat illness can lead to long-term health problems. These illnesses include: heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat fainting, heat edema (swelling of hands or feet), heat rash, and heat cramps. These can come on fast, and are mainly caused by over-exposure to heat. If not prevented, heat illness can lead to serious health impacts or even death.

Your body produces heat, especially during physical activity. Weather conditions play a role in how your body regulates its temperature, and can impact your body's ability to do this; for example, high humidity slows down sweat evaporation and makes it more difficult for your body to cool itself down.

Here are some things you can do in extreme heat to be safe while being active:

Be prepared:

Your body needs time to get used to extreme heat and activity in hot weather at the beginning of the summer. Be sure to check the temperature outside before beginning to work or exercise so that you can modify your activity levels as needed. If you're on the job, you may need to slow your pace and take extra breaks in extreme heat to prevent illness. Let supervisors, coworkers, coaches or teammates know that they should pay attention to your condition if you have an increased risk of suffering heat illness.

Adjust your routine:

Try to reschedule strenuous activity to a cooler part of the day (early morning or evening) if possible, or another day with a cooler forecast. Exercising indoors in an air-conditioned space or choosing a cooler outdoor location can also help you to avoid heat illness. Finding places such as a tree-shaded area away from traffic during work breaks is a good idea. These areas can be up to five degrees cooler and have better air quality. Be realistic about performance goals during extreme heat – your body may not be up to its usual performance. Also take extra water breaks, and allow your body to fully recover after activity. Try to rest in a cool place for a few hours after activity, such as your home, a shaded area, a mall or grocery store, a library, or a community center.

Stay alert:

Pay close attention to how you and others around you are feeling. Watch for symptoms of heat illness, which include dizziness or fainting, nausea, headache, rapid heart rate, and extreme thirst. If you experience any of these symptoms while being active, immediately move into a cool place (the shade or indoors) and drink liquids. Do not try to work or exercise through these symptoms!

Stay hydrated:

Drink plenty of cool liquids, especially water, before you begin to work or exercise, and before you feel thirsty. Thirst is not a good indicator of hydration, because when you start feeling thirsty you're already dehydrated. You should drink plenty of water before, during, and after being physically active. You should also wear light, loose-fitting, breathable fabric, and you can increase cooling by splashing yourself with water.

Heat stroke is a medical emergency. Seek medical care immediately if you or someone you're with is over-heated and feeling nauseous, confused, has suddenly stopped sweating, or has lost consciousness. While waiting for help, try to cool the affected person down right away by moving into a cool place if you can, or by applying cold water to large parts of the skin or clothing if possible.

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