



## Patient Information

# Preventing Heat-Related Illness

Every summer the number of heat-related emergency department visits soars because people don't recognize the heat's potential consequences. Heat can lead to dehydration, which can worsen to heat exhaustion and heat stroke. And in more serious instances, heat can kill.

### Heat-related illnesses are preventable.

Heat-related illnesses are 100% preventable. You can avoid dehydration and the serious effects of heat exhaustion and stroke with some precautionary steps. Research shows that people don't drink enough fluids, especially when active in the heat. So the first step in preventing dehydration is to drink plenty of fluids.

Other prevention tips include:

- Avoid caffeinated beverages and alcohol. These fluids dehydrate the body rather than hydrate it, as water and sports drinks can. Also avoid carbonated beverages, which can cause bloating and deter you from drinking enough fluid to rehydrate.
- Wear light-colored, absorbent and loose-fitting clothing.
- Stay in cool, shaded areas when possible, and protect your skin with sun block.

### Dehydration can be dangerous.

In hot and humid conditions, it's possible for you to become dehydrated in just 15 minutes. As little as 1.3 pounds of fluid loss in a 130-pound person can lead to early fatigue and increase the risk for dehydration. Symptoms of dehydration include dry lips and tongue, lack of energy, muscle cramping and bright-colored or dark urine.

If left untreated, dehydration can progress to heat exhaustion. Heat exhaustion occurs when the body's circulation system fails to maintain normal functions because of a loss of body fluids and salts. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include dizziness, headache, profuse sweating, elevated temperature, cool and clammy skin texture, nausea or vomiting, rapid and shallow breathing, rapid heartbeat and decreased alertness or complete loss of consciousness. If you experience these symptoms, stop activity immediately

ly and cool down in the shade or an air-conditioned building.

### Heat stroke can kill.

Untreated heat exhaustion can escalate to heat stroke. As in heat exhaustion, the body's temperature regulation system fails. As water and salt supplies dwindle, body temperature rises to extreme levels. This heightened temperature can severely damage the brain, liver or kidneys. Symptoms of heat stroke are similar to those of heat exhaustion, but more extreme. Body temperature usually exceeds 105° F and the skin becomes red, dry or very hot.

Heat exhaustion and stroke can be prevented by following a few simple precautions:

- Never leave anyone—including animals—in a parked vehicle with the windows closed during hot weather.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Plan strenuous activities for early or late in the day when it is cooler; then, gradually build tolerance for warmer conditions.
- Stay indoors and in air-conditioning as much as possible unless your heat tolerance is well-established. If air-conditioning is not available, use fans to cool rooms and pull shades over windows. Open windows on opposite sides of the room to achieve cross-ventilation.
- Eat more frequently, but make sure meals are well-balanced and light.
- Consult your nurse practitioner to determine the effects of sun and heat exposure while taking prescription medications, such as diuretics or antihistamines.
- Remember that babies do not tolerate heat well because their sweat glands are not fully developed. Infants and the elderly are especially vulnerable in the hot weather. Check frequently on ill or elderly friends or relatives who may need your help.
- At the first signs of heat illness (dizziness, nausea, headaches, cramps), move to a cooler location, rest and slowly drink a cool beverage. If you do not improve, seek medical attention immediately.

### Additional Notes:

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*Your nurse practitioner has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about principles related to your medical condition. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, be sure to discuss them with your nurse practitioner.*

