

Heat Emergencies

Heat emergencies are of three types: heat cramps (caused by loss of salt), heat exhaustion (caused by dehydration), and heat stroke (shock).

Remove the victim from the heat and have him lie down. Apply cool compresses, elevate the feet, drink fluids and use a fan to blow cool air. Get medical help if needed.

Heat emergencies are easily preventable by taking precautions in hot weather. If the problem isn't addressed, heat cramps (caused by loss of salt from heavy sweating) can lead to heat exhaustion (caused by dehydration), which can progress to heatstroke.

Heatstroke, the most serious of the three, can cause shock, brain damage, organ failure, and even death.

The early symptoms of a heat emergency include: Profuse sweating, fatigue, thirst, and muscle cramps. Later symptoms of heat exhaustion include: headache, dizziness and lightheadedness, weakness, nausea and vomiting, cool moist skin, and dark urine.

The symptoms of heatstroke include: fever, irrational behavior, confusion, dry, hot and red skin, rapid shallow breathing and pulse, seizures, and unconsciousness.

Call 9-1-1 if:

- The person loses consciousness at anytime
- There is any other change in the person's alertness (for example, confusion or seizures).
- Fever (temp above 104° F)
- The person shows signs of shock (bluish lips and fingernails and decreased alertness).

- Other symptoms of heat stroke are present (like rapid pulse or rapid breathing).
- The person's condition does not improve, or worsens despite treatment.

Prevention

- Wear loose-fitting, lightweight clothing in hot weather.
- Rest frequently and seek shade when possible.
- Avoid exercise or strenuous physical activity outside during hot or humid weather.
- Drink plenty of fluids every day. Drink more fluids before, during, and after physical activity.
- Be especially careful to avoid overheating if you are taking drugs that impair heat regulation, or if you are overweight or elderly.