

Heat Related Illness: The Best Defense Is Prevention

Doing too much on a hot day, spending too much time in the sun or staying too long in an overheated place can cause heat-related illnesses. If you must be out in the heat here are some prevention tips to prevent heat related illness. Drink more fluids (nonalcoholic), regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink; if your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask him how much you should drink while the weather is hot. Electric fans may provide comfort, but when the temperature is in the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat-related illness. Taking a cool shower or bath, or moving to an air-conditioned place is a much better way to cool off. Choose lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. Sunburn affects your body's ability to cool itself and causes a loss of body fluids. It also causes pain and damages the skin. If you must go outdoors, protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat (also keeps you cooler) along with sunglasses, and by putting on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher (the most effective products say "broad spectrum" or "UVA/UVB protection" on their labels) 30 minutes prior to going out. If you must be outdoors, try to limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours. Try to rest often in shady areas so that your body's thermostat will have a chance to recover. If you are not accustomed to working or exercising in a hot environment, start slowly and pick up the pace gradually. If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, STOP all activity. Get into a cool area or at least into the shade, and rest, especially if you become lightheaded, confused, weak, or faint.

Although anyone at any time can suffer from heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others. Infants and young children are sensitive to the effects of high temperatures and rely on others to regulate their environments and provide adequate liquids. Children can be more sensitive to the effects of the heat if they are ill or are taking certain medications. If your child has recently been ill, or is currently being treated for an illness, try to avoid exposing him/her to severe heat for a prolonged period of time. If your child is in a stroller for a long period of time during extreme heat, make sure there is adequate ventilation (a small clip on battery powered fan is helpful), assure the child is not placed in the sun and apply sunscreen of SPF 45 or higher if the child is over six months of age, and make sure the child drinks plenty of water. Infants under six months of age should never be exposed to the sun or extremely high temperatures.

Even short periods of high temperatures can cause serious health problems. During hot weather keep informed of health emergencies by listening to local weather and news channels, or contact the local health department for health and safety updates. For more health related information to avoid heat-related illnesses visit www.stonecountyhealthdepartment.com and www.cdc.gov.