

Recognizing heat exhaustion

In the summer, abundant sunshine and warmer temperatures have a way of luring people outdoors and making them more active than usual. Excessive heat and humidity can, however, pose health risks and should be taken seriously. Our body's cooling system can be compared to that of a vehicle's. If our body isn't cooling itself properly, then it will eventually overheat, causing moderate to severe illnesses and sometimes death.

In order to cool itself the body releases perspiration, or sweat, which evaporates off of the skin, releasing heat. High humidity levels slow the rate at which sweat will evaporate and prevent the body from releasing heat quickly.

Heat exhaustion is a more mild form of heat-related illness, and can sometimes take several days of exposure to high temperatures or inadequate fluid intake to develop. People who are most prone to heat exhaustion are those with high blood pressure, those who work or exercise in high temperatures, the very young and the elderly.

Young children are at risk because their body's heat regulatory system hasn't fully developed yet. Children may also not be able to recognize what is happening to them when they feel dehydrated or ill. Older adults are at risk because their heat regulatory system may not function as well as it once did.

Some warning signs of heat exhaustion include profuse sweating,



Home Time

By Tranda Watts
Multi-county Extension Agent

a pale or grayish complexion, muscle cramps, fatigue, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting, and fainting. A person experiencing heat exhaustion may also have cool and moist skin; a fast, weak pulse rate; and quick, shallow breathing.

If someone shows signs of heat exhaustion, get them out of the sun and into a cool or air-conditioned location. Lay the person down and elevate the legs and feet slightly. Cool the person down by spraying or sponging them with cool water. Let them drink cool water or a sports drink that contains electrolytes. Then, monitor the person to make sure he or she does not slip into a condition called heat stroke.

Heat exhaustion is a medical emergency and if untreated can cause serious injury or death. Call 911 if the person's temperature goes higher than 102 degrees Fahrenheit, or if fainting, confusion, or seizures occur.

If you must work outdoors, try to work early in the morning or in the evenings, and avoid sun exposure

between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun is at its hottest. It takes a couple of weeks for people to become acclimated to working in hot temperatures, so it's important to work at a gradual pace and don't push yourself too hard.

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"I was going to the cardiologist in Wichita and was not too happy..."

John Strobel, Retired Professor of Music

A couple of episodes of afibrillation two years ago sent John Strobel to seek specialized cardiology services in Wichita. A heart catheterization and angiogram showed a major blockage on the right-hand side of his heart. Fortunately, the left-hand side of his heart had channeled over the right and was covering the problem. While the diagnosis was encouraging, the overall cardiology experience in Wichita was not.

"I was going to the cardiologist in Wichita and was not too happy with a number of things...the distance to get down there, one thing, and just the whole procedure was not up to my expectations," he said.

When it was time for him to go back for another treadmill, instead of returning to Wichita, Strobel requested a referral to Hays and the DeBaKey Heart Institute. In addition to the treadmill, the DeBaKey cardiologists also performed a carotid artery Doppler to make sure he wasn't in danger of a stroke.

"When we did the tests in Wichita, it took two weeks before we had the results and when we had it at DeBaKey Institute in Hays, we had the results within the hour," he said.

"At the DeBaKey Institute in Hays, the people were more interested in me and in seeing to it that I was happy with what was going on and that I was comfortable."

"And then, of course, too, the drive to Wichita is kind of a hectic drive," he said. "The drive itself becomes a trauma...Two hours down there and then have to fight the traffic after you get there...and then worry about trying to find a place to park...It's an easy hour to Hays and you don't fight city traffic."

"It was just a much more pleasant experience," he said. "I can drive an hour and have absolutely state-of-the-art cardiology."

"I just go on and live a normal life now."



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