

Staying Cool When It Matters

What is Heatstroke?

Heatstroke is a life-threatening illness that occurs when a person's body temperature rises to 105 degrees Fahrenheit. Even if it doesn't cause death, it can cause permanent brain damage, as the cells in the brain are literally boiled. If the heat persists, other organs in the body will begin to shut down also. Muscle cells and blood vessels are destroyed, and if the heatstroke goes untreated, the victim will die.

There are two types of heat stroke and they usually affect different types of people:

Non-exertion heatstroke occurs when a victim is inactive and exposed to too much sun. Victims often are those who are more vulnerable to illness such as small children, people with chronic illnesses, and the elderly. These people usually have a decreased ability to regulate their body temperature and therefore are more likely to become overheated.

Exertion heatstroke occurs in otherwise healthy people when they are active outside during periods of high temperature. Frequently, young people think that they're not vulnerable to illnesses such as heatstroke. But think about the many young athletes who die while practicing or playing during times of extreme outdoor temperature.

Warning Signs

Before heatstroke, people usually experience warning signs known as heat exhaustion. The symptoms of heat exhaustion include headache, nausea, vomiting, muscle cramps, and fatigue. These are symptoms that people suffer as a result of a number of sicknesses of the body, so it is important that you recognize if your symptoms are or are not related to the heat. If they are, get yourself to a cool place. If someone suffering from heat exhaustion is not treated, they will quickly develop a potentially deadly case of heatstroke.

Once the heatstroke has set in, victims will become confused and irritable. In most cases, they will begin to suffer from delusions, hallucinations, and even seizures. Usually this indicates that the damage has already been done. If the victim's body temperature is not lowered immediately, they may slip into a coma and die.

How to Stay Safe

The most important thing you can do is to keep yourself cool. If you don't have air conditioning, go to a public facility that does such as a mall or the YMCA.

Be sure to stay well hydrated in the heat. It is recommended that you drink more than twice the amount of water that you would on a normal day. Wear lightweight clothing and rest often. Pay attention to your body, and never ignore the onset of early symptoms such as headache and fatigue.

People who are overweight, take certain medications, or use illegal drugs are at an even higher risk for heatstroke. If you fall into one of these categories, don't take chances. Drink lots of water and rest in a shaded, cool place until the outdoor temperature drops.