

# Hot Weather Safety: Fast Action for Heat Exhaustion and Heatstroke

By Kerry Horne

Whether you're working outdoors as part of a public works or highway department, or simply exercising outside on your own, heat exhaustion and heatstroke can be serious threats in the summer. These conditions occur when your body gets too hot, especially if you haven't been drinking enough fluids throughout the day. To prevent heat exhaustion while spending time outdoors, drink at least two cups of water per hour and avoid drinks containing alcohol or large amounts of sugar, wear sunscreen and lightweight clothing, and take breaks in the shade when possible. Know the signs of heat exhaustion and take steps to stop it from progressing to the life-threatening condition known as heatstroke.

## Signs of Heat Exhaustion

- Muscle cramping (often the first sign)
- Cool, moist, pale or flushed red skin
- Heavy sweating
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness
- Extreme fatigue

**What to do:** Get out of the heat immediately; go into the shade or inside to an air-conditioned environment. Lie down and remove any unnecessary clothing. Sip water. If you don't start to feel better within 30 minutes, call your doctor.

## Signs of Heatstroke

- Hot, red, dry skin
- Lack of perspiration
- Fever of 104 degrees Fahrenheit or higher
- Loss of consciousness
- Rapid or weak pulse
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Confusion
- Repeated vomiting

**What to do:** Call 911 immediately. Heatstroke is a medical emergency that can result in organ and brain damage and eventually even death. Remove the person to a cool environment, apply cool cloths. Do not give fluids, fever-reducing medicine or anything by mouth.

*Kerry Horne is HealthTrust's Wellness Coordinator.*

## Are You At Increased Risk?

You could be at increased risk of heat exhaustion and heatstroke if you:

- Are pregnant
- Are 65 years old or older, or five years old or younger
- Are obese and/or have a chronic condition such as respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease or high blood pressure
- Take any of the following medicines.
  - Allergy medicines (antihistamines)
  - Blood pressure and heart medicines (beta-blockers and vasoconstrictors)
  - Diet pills and illegal drugs such as cocaine (amphetamines)
  - Laxatives
  - Antidepressants and/or antipsychotic medicines
  - Seizure medicines (anticonvulsants)
  - Water pills (diuretics)

If you have any of these risk factors, talk with your doctor about steps you can take to prevent heat exhaustion and heatstroke.

