

HEAT STRESS DISORDERS

The average temperature of a human body is 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Changes in body temperature, even by just a few degrees, can cause serious bodily harm. Working in high temperatures and/or humid conditions greatly increases the risk of such changes.

Heat stroke is the most dangerous of all heat related injuries. When it occurs, your body loses the ability to regulate its own temperature. Symptoms of heat stroke include loss of the ability to sweat, dry-hot skin, mental confusion, convulsions, delirium, loss of consciousness, and even falling in to a coma. If you or a colleague exhibits these symptoms, seek immediate medical attention.

When waiting for medical personnel to arrive, move the victim to a cooler place, soak the victim's clothing with cool water, offer them small sips of water and fan them vigorously. If you do not seek immediate medical attention, heat stroke can kill.

Heat exhaustion is another dangerous heat related illness. It is caused by exposure to high temperatures, particularly when combined with high humidity, and strenuous physical activity. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include clammy, moist skin and pale complexion. These signs and indicators may also be accompanied by extreme fatigue, headache, nausea, vomiting, giddiness and even fainting. You can treat heat exhaustion by moving the victim to a cooler place, soaking their clothing in cool water, fanning them vigorously and offering them a drink with electrolytes.

Fainting may also occur when with prolonged exposure to a hot environment. This happens most often when you are standing still for extended periods of time. Victims usually recover from fainting after a period of lying down.

A less severe condition that you may incur when working in extreme temperatures is heat cramps. Heat cramps are muscle spasms that are caused by dehydration. They usually occur in the calf muscles. If heat cramps become common, consult a doctor to determine the best way to treat them.

You may also experience heat rash when working in hot and humid conditions. This occurs when sweat causes wet or moist clothing to rub against your skin. Heat rash can be prevented by resting in a cool place and allowing sweat to dry.

There are a number of tactics that you can employ to prevent heat related injuries and illnesses. Some of those include wearing a hat and sunscreen, drinking plenty of fluids and avoiding caffeine, alcohol and very cold drinks. Caffeine and alcohol can dehydrate you and cold drinks can cause stomach cramps.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are some symptoms of heat stroke?

What are heat cramps?

Why should you avoid caffeine, alcohol and very cold drinks?