

Fieldcraft Skills

Field First Aid



Heat-Related Injuries

Heat related injuries take place when the body is impaired in the ability to maintain core body temperature. The body cools itself through evaporation, and evaporation is facilitated by the process of sweating, which is directly related to level of hydration. In humid weather, sweat does not evaporate as effectively as when the humidity is lower. Sweat remains on the surface of the body and does not evaporate to cool the body temperature. This leads to a greater risk of heat-related injury such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and even heat stroke. When dehydration symptoms are present, the risk of heat related injuries is even greater.

The chart below details heat-related injuries, the symptoms, and treatments.

Heat Cramps

Heat Cramps Symptoms

- heavy sweating
- abdominal cramps
- calf and leg cramps
- body aches

Heat Cramps Treatment

- occur when sweating depletes the body of salts and fluids.
- have the person rest in a cool area and drink water.
- monitor the person for worsening of symptoms, and continue to treat as necessary

Heat Exhaustion

Heat Exhaustion Symptoms

- Heavy sweating
- Severe thirst
- Rapid pulse
- Pale or ashen skin
- Fatigue, weakness, irritability
- Nausea, dizziness, headache
- Inability to concentrate

Heat Exhaustion Treatment

- occurs due to the excessive loss of water and electrolytes through excessive sweating.
- provide cool water
- cool the person by getting them out of the heat, removing excess clothing, wet the person with cold water
- Heat exhaustion can progress to heatstroke, especially if not recognized and treated effectively
- Consider alerting EMS for evacuation if the person does not start to show improve within 30 minutes

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Heat Stroke

Heatstroke is a true Medical Emergency

Heat Stroke Symptoms

- hot, dry, flushed skin
- headache, body aches
- altered mental status
- extreme fatigue
- nausea, vomiting

Heat Stroke Treatment

- immediate cooling, activation of the EMS and evacuation is critical
- the body is no longer able to cool itself, therefore it is essential to cool the person quickly by any means possible
- move the person to a cool, shaded area; remove as much clothing as possible; wet, or immerse them in cold water; place ice packs in the person's armpits, groin, and sides of the neck.
- If the person loses consciousness, place them in the recovery position, and monitor their airway and status while you prepare for a rapid evacuation.
- *Do not give an unconscious person anything by mouth*

Prevention is the key to prevent and avoid heat-related injuries

- monitor weather trends in advance
- prepare the body for hot environments by acclimatization
- hydrate prior to starting activities
- watch for signs and symptoms of heat-related injuries

Prepared for outdoor activities in hot weather by acclimating to the environment for a minimum of seven days prior to any outdoor adventures. Drinking plenty of fluids beforehand, and continuing to drink plenty of fluids on hot or humid days. Plan for frequent breaks, especially if you are engaged in strenuous activities.