



# WEEKLY SAFETY MOMENT

## Heat Stress-What's Your Boiling Point?



Much like escalating warning signs, heat has several stages that range in severity. Dehydration, heat rash, cramps and even exhaustion are considered critical; however, you can fully recover from these. The last stage, heat stroke, without immediate attention can have grave consequences. Once a heat stroke has been suffered, you will forever be susceptible to the mildest effects of heat. The best proactive measure is knowledge, so study each level of heat stress, its related symptoms, and what to do when you've had too much.

- ❖ **Dehydration** - Occurs when you lose more fluid than you take in and your body cannot carry out its normal functions. Excessive sweating and inadequate intake of water can diminish your body's fluid stores. Anyone can become dehydrated and serious consequences can result if fluids remain depleted. Treatment consists of replenishing fluids your body has lost. Drink at least 32 ounces of water or sports drinks slowly and steadily. Symptoms to watch for include:
  - Dry, sticky mouth / Thirst (a.k.a. cotton mouth)
  - Sleepiness or Tiredness
  - Decreased urine output
  - Muscle fatigue / Headache
  - Dizziness or Lightheadedness
  
- ❖ **Heat Cramps** - Brief, severe cramps or spasms in the muscles of the legs, arms, or abdomen that occur during or after vigorous exercise or working in extreme heat. Sweating causes the body to lose salts and fluids; this low level of salts causes muscles to cramp. Heat cramps can still occur even with drinking water as it is not dehydration; it is the loss of salts and other electrolytes such as calcium from your body. Heat cramps can be very painful but are treated easily by replacing the electrolytes your body has lost. If suffering from heat cramps, you can:
  - Rest briefly and cool down
  - Drink an electrolyte-containing sports drink such as Gator-Aid/PowerAde.
  - Do range-of-motion stretching and gentle massaging of the affected muscle group.
  
- ❖ **Heat Exhaustion** - A condition that includes symptoms such as heavy sweating and a rapid pulse, due to overheating. Causes of heat exhaustion include exposure to high temperatures combined with high humidity, and strenuous physical activity. Heat exhaustion serves the best notification prior to succumbing to heat stroke, warnings include:
  - Headache, Weakness, or Fainting.
  - Heavy sweating / Skin that is moist, hot and appears flushed.
  - Mood changes such as irritability or confusion
  - Upset stomach or vomiting

In most cases, you can treat heat exhaustion yourself by doing the following:

  - Resting in cool shade on your back, with your legs elevated higher than your heart.
  - Drink cool fluids - water or sports drinks; avoid beverages with alcohol or caffeine.
  - Apply cool water to your skin; either by shower or water hose.
  - Loosen / Remove any unnecessary clothing.
  
- ❖ **Heat Stroke** - A life-threatening condition that occurs when your internal body temperature reaches 104°F or higher. Heatstroke is the escalation of two other heat-related health problems: heat cramps and exhaustion. Whatever the cause, summon immediate medical attention to prevent brain damage, organ failure or death. Signs of Heat Stroke are:
  - Cessation of sweating - the first sign that your body temp is too high; the skin is hot and dry to the touch.
  - Hyperventilation or Rapid Heartbeat/Pulse - breathing becomes rapid and shallow.
  - Seizures, Convulsions, or Neurological symptoms - lose consciousness, slip into a coma, hallucinate, or have difficulty speaking or understanding what others are saying.