Heat Illness Prevention

Heat illness is a group of conditions that occur when your body overheats and can no longer cool itself down. It ranges from heat cramps and heat exhaustion to heat stroke, which, if not treated, can become life-threatening.

How to Protect Yourself

Knowing the warning signs of heat illness can help you catch it early before it becomes serious. Symptoms may include:

- Heavy sweating or, in severe cases, a complete stop in sweating
- Dizziness, lightheadedness or fainting
- Nausea or vomiting
- Headache
- Muscle cramps or weakness
- Pale, flushed or hot skin
- Rapid or weak pulse
- Confusion, slurred speech or unusual behavior

How to Protect Yourself

- **Drink water frequently**. Drink enough water so that you never become thirsty. If you're thirsty, you're already mildly dehydrated. Aim for about 1 cup of water every 15 to 20 minutes during hot conditions.
- **Avoid drinks with caffeine, alcohol and large amounts of sugar**. They have a diuretic effect and can contribute to dehydration, making it harder for your body to regulate temperature. Water and electrolyte drinks are the better choice.
- **Avoid heavy meals before and during your shift**. Digesting large amounts of food generates body heat and diverts blood flow to your digestive system, making it harder for your body to stay cool. Opt for lighter meals and snacks that are easy to digest.
- **Take more breaks in extreme heat and humidity**. Rest in the shade or a cool area whenever possible. Even short breaks give your body a chance to recover and bring your core temperature down.
- **Wear light-colored, loose-fitting, breathable clothing (e.g., cotton)**. Light colors reflect heat rather than absorb it, and breathable fabrics allow sweat to evaporate and cool your skin. Avoid non-breathing synthetic clothing, which traps heat against your body.
- **Gradually build up to heavy work**. Your body needs one to two weeks to adjust to working in the heat, a process called acclimatization. If you're new to the job, returning after time away or facing a sudden stretch of hotter weather, ease into physically demanding tasks and give your body time to adapt.
- **Monitor your physical condition and that of your co-workers throughout the day**. Heat illness can affect your ability to think clearly, making it hard to recognize that something is wrong. Watch for warning signs in others, including heavy sweating, pale or flushed skin, dizziness, nausea, and confusion.

Take Action

If you or a co-worker shows signs of heat illness, act immediately:

- Move the person to a cool, shaded area.
- Loosen or remove excess clothing.
- Apply cool, wet cloths to the skin or use a fan to help lower body temperature.
- Encourage the person to drink cool water if they are alert and able to swallow.
- Call 911 immediately if the person is confused, stops sweating, loses consciousness or does not improve.
- Report the situation to your supervisor.

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Do not wait to see if symptoms improve on their own. When in doubt, call for help.