

Heat Stress

What is heat stress?

Heat stress occurs when the body has difficulty maintaining its normal temperature range. In this instance, the body does two things cool itself: increases sweating and moves blood closer to the skin's surface to remove heat. As bloods rushes to the skin, it draws blood from the brain and active muscles resulting in dizziness, fatigue, cramps, weakness, accelerated heart rates, clammy skin and in some cases increased breathing.

What leads to heat stress?

A combination of factors cause heat stress. Air temperatures, radiant heat sources such as welding, employee age, preexisting health issues, fitness level, substance abuse and clothing all play a part in heat stress. It is important to consider these factors working in hot, humid conditions.

- Hot Temperatures reduces the body's ability to release heat
- Heavy sweating leads to loss of water and electrolytes (salt)
- High humidity reduces sweat evaporation

Disorder	Cause	Signs & symptoms	Course of Action
Heat stroke	The body's cooling system breaks down	Sweating stops Skin is hot red and dry, Body temp >103°F; headache, dizziness, weakness, rapid pulse	Call medical personnel ASAP Move victim to cool area Immerse in cool water or massage body with ice; Do not give liquids
Heat exhaustion	Excessive loss of water and electrolytes	Heavy sweating, intense thirst, Skin is pale and cool to touch, Rapid pulse, fatigue/weakness, Nausea & vomiting, headache, Blurred vision, fainting	Move to cool area Rest with legs elevated Loosen clothing Slowly drink plenty of fluids
Heat cramps	Large loss of water and electrolytes	Painful spasms in arms, legs and abdomen; hot, moist skin	Drink fluids Massage cramped areas and rest
Dehydration	Large loss of water and electrolytes	Fatigue, weakness, dry mouth	Drink fluids and replace electrolytes

How to avoid heat stress:

- Prepare yourself on the night and day before. Avoid alcohol consumption, which dehydrates the body. Consume water, fruit and vegetables that help hydrate.
- Sodas, energy drinks and other sugary drinks actually dehydrate us. Avoid them during the work shift.
- Drink water frequently, approximately 8 ounces every 15-20 minutes, increase the frequency for higher humidity and temperature. Do not wait until you are thirsty.
- Perform labor-intensive tasks during cooler morning hours.
- Frequent rest when working in hot environments, increasing break frequency as temperature and humidity rise.
- Eat light meals during the course of the day, saving your heaviest meal for that evening. Your body can use that energy for cooling instead of digesting a heavy meal.
- Slowly incorporate new workers into warm working environments. It can take 1-2 weeks for the body to adjust.
- Wear light colored, breathable cotton clothes. Keep your shirt on! Protect your skin from direct sun exposure.

Discuss how your company addresses a heat related incident. What steps do we take on this specific site?

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