

Four Ways for Athletes to Beat the Heat

For athletes, avoiding the heat can be challenging this time of year. “Every year emergency departments are filled with athletes who have not prepared or paid attention to staying hydrated, causing them to suffer from heat-related illnesses,” according to the physicians at Methodist Sports Medicine / The Orthopedic Specialists.

If your summer sport of choice requires you to be outdoors, there are several things you should be doing to reduce your risk of dehydration.

Be prepared: Your preparation prior to outdoor summer activities can have the strongest impact on preventing heat-related illnesses. Checking the weather can give you an idea of what temperatures to expect and can tell you the intensity of the heat. Performing strenuous exercises during the early morning and late afternoon can help you avoid the hottest times of day. Additionally, proper attire, such as wearing light colored clothes that reflect the light and transfer the moisture away from your body can help keep your skin cool and decrease the absorption of UV rays. All of these factors can help reduce the acceleration of dehydration.

Proper hydration: Being properly hydrated before your summer sporting event is just as important as staying hydrated during your game. You should drink 8-12 cups of water daily, or 8 ounces. If your body’s “tank” is full going in, you will be much more tolerant of the heat. If you become dehydrated, it is almost impossible to replenish the deficit from ongoing fluid loss during a game. Experiment with various types of drinks ranging from water to sports drinks to determine what works best to keep you hydrated.

Know the signs of heat-related illness: A mild form of heat-related illness is known as heat exhaustion. Some signs that you may be experiencing this include heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, headache, fainting, nausea or vomiting. Your skin may be cool or moist to the touch and your pulse rate will be fast and weak. If not treated properly, you can suffer from a heat stroke, a sign of hypothermia, where you have an abnormally elevated blood temperature. Symptoms can mimic those of a heart attack. You may not emit sweat, but may suffer from a red or flushed face, hallucinations, changes in behavior, confusion or even a seizure.

Treatment: The most important thing to do when treating a heat-related illness is to move, or be moved by someone, to a cool and shaded place as soon as possible. Make sure that any tight clothing is loosened and remove any extra layers. You should drink about half a glass of fluid such as water or a sport drink every 15 to 20 minutes. Do not drink any alcohol or caffeine, as it will further dehydrate your body. To help get your body temperature back down, sponge off with a cool, wet cloth. If you follow these guidelines you will most likely begin feeling better in about 30 minutes. If symptoms persist or worsen, call for emergency medical assistance.

For more information on avoiding heat-related illness visit <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/>

Methodist Sports Medicine / The Orthopedic Specialists is a partner of Clarian Human Motion.