Extreme heat can be dangerous

Farm and city dwellers both enjoy working and being outdoors. However, as we move into the middle of summer we need to be reminded that extreme hot weather can also be a major health concern.

Working in extreme heat for long periods of time can increase the risk of a heat stress injury such as heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

These types of injuries can occur when the body cannot regulate its temperature and can become serious medical emergencies if precautions are not taken.

Individuals with pre-existing conditions, such as limited mobility, heart disease, and taking certain medications are at an even higher risk to a heat stress injury and should consult with their local health care provider before working in extreme conditions.

Some precautions should include:

- When possible, strenuous work should be scheduled for the coolest time of day. Generally, early morning is the coolest part of the day.
- Wear light-colored and lightweight clothing. Light colors reflect heat and sunlight and the combination of lightweight materials will help the body maintain normal temperature.
- Take multiple short breaks throughout the day. Breaks should be in a shaded area or controlled temperature environment.
- Equipment or machines that give off additional heat during operations may add additional stress on hot days. Alternate these operations with tasks in cooler environments, such as shade or temperature-controlled environments.
- It is important for the body to stay hydrated. Drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after strenuous activities.
- Drink cold fluids and avoid consuming alcoholic beverages. Cold fluids can help cool the body; alcoholic beverages may encourage dehydration.
- Adjust your diet when working in heat. Avoid foods that are high in protein because they increase metabolism, increasing body heat and water loss.
- Do not get too much sun.

Avoid scheduling outdoor tasks in direct sunlight, such as the middle of the day.

- Use sunscreen. Sunburn makes it more difficult to regulate and reduce body temperature.
- During hot days, spend time in air-conditioned facilities, especially during periods of rest. Breaks in air conditioning will allow the body to recuperate from heat.

It is important to be able to recognize symptoms of heat-related injuries. Heat stroke is the most severe and will require medical attention.

Symptoms of heat stroke include irrational behavior, loss of sweating, hot dry skin, abnormally high body temperatures, convulsions and loss of consciousness.

Heat exhaustion is less severe than heat stroke but demands attention. Heat exhaustion symptoms include headaches, nausea, weakness and thirst. A person needs to get out of the sun and heat if feeling these symptoms.

Individuals who do not allow their bodies to acclimate to heat may have heat collapse. The unconsciousness is caused by blood pools in the extremities of the brain, reducing the amount of oxygen getting to the brain. Gradually working into a heat environment will diminish the chance of heat collapse.

For many of us, cramps are a symptom of heat stress. Heat cramps are caused by dehydration. Consuming water every 20 to 30 minutes will help prevent cramps. Dehydration during the day may lead to cramps in the night.

All of us have to work in the heat at times to take care of our families. Farmers also must work outside taking care of livestock, fields, and buildings. We need to remember our limitations, drink plenty of fluids, limit time in the heat, and pay attention to symptoms of heat-related stress.

Additional information may be found on the Ohio State University fact sheet: "Secondary Injury Prevention: Heat Stress" at https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/AEX-681.4-10

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