

The Health Corner: Healthcare provider issues heat warning

Written by Submitted by Robin Kent, PCA
Thursday, 30 June 2011 14:33 -

June 23, 2011 - After already seeing heat-related illnesses in patients, local healthcare provider Robin Kent would like to remind readers of a few important steps to avoid falling prey to the soaring Texas temperatures.

Beat the Heat? Not in Texasbut Here's How to Live With It

Q: How do you know it's summer in Texas?

A: The birds have to use potholders to pull worms out of the ground. Here in the nation's second hottest state -- we're just behind Arizona -- a sense of humor goes a long way toward dealing with summer. But with this August shaping up as one of the hottest and driest in recent memory, it'll take more than jokes to deal with our triple-digit heat.

Here are a few suggestions from the Centers for Disease Control and the Texas Department of State Health Services.

First, remember that heat's effects can sneak up on you -- fast. Like a car with an overtaxed radiator, your body's temperature can rise quickly during heat stress or heatstroke, rocketing from normal (98.6 degrees) to 106 degrees or higher in 10 to 15 minutes.

Heatstroke happens when your body loses most or all of its ability to regulate temperature. Prompt medical attention can restore your normal body temperature and prevent death or permanent disability.

But you don't want things to go that far. Instead, pay close attention to your body when you're exposed to high temperatures for a half-hour or more, especially if the humidity also is high. (High humidity makes it harder for the body to dissipate heat through sweat.) Get inside or find shade immediately if you notice any or all of these symptoms of heat illness: muscle cramps or weakness, dizziness, nausea, headaches or weak but rapid pulse.

The Health Corner: Healthcare provider issues heat warning

Written by Submitted by Robin Kent, PCA
Thursday, 30 June 2011 14:33 -

Once you're in a cooler environment with better ventilation, rehydrate slowly but steadily, preferably with water rather than caffeinated beverages. Check your temperature until you're down to 101 degrees. If you don't feel better soon, seek medical attention.

Even if you're not in immediate danger of heatstroke, try to avoid prolonged exposure to very high heats. Extended sun exposure and overheating can lead to problems such as sunburn, heat rash, heat cramps (often associated with strenuous exercise in high temperatures), increased skin cancer risk and temporarily impaired mental function.

For heat cramp treatment, cooling down is the key. It's also helpful to hydrate with cool water and eat a banana or other potassium- or sodium-rich food.

Q: Who's Most at Risk?

A: While outdoor workers and athletes of all ages are obvious candidates for heat-related stress or illness, the most serious risk is to young children, the elderly and people who use certain prescription medications.

If you know of an older person who spends a lot of time in temperatures in the upper 90s or above, and whose home lacks air conditioning, try to get him or her to a cooler environment such as a shopping mall or library during the hottest part of the day. Fans can increase comfort during high heat, but they can't prevent heat illness in extreme temperatures. The older person also can reduce the danger of heat illness by taking occasional cool showers.

Children are vulnerable mainly because of their tendency to dehydrate quickly. Parents should make sure children are drinking fluids often and wearing loose, light-colored clothes to reduce perspiration. They also should avoid sugary or caffeinated drinks (sodas are double offenders here) in favor of water or artificially sweetened drinks.

Doctors also note that heat-related illness is a risk for people on medicines such as Parkinson's Disease regulators, psychotropics such as chlorpromazine or haloperidol, "water pills" that reduce body fluid levels, and tranquilizers in the phenothiazine, butyrophenone

The Health Corner: Healthcare provider issues heat warning

Written by Submitted by Robin Kent, PCA
Thursday, 30 June 2011 14:33 -

and thioxanthene classes.

Common Sense Goes a Long Way

Other good advice from medical and public health professionals includes:

Take plenty of breaks from strenuous outside work in high heat.

Don't leave anyone -- even briefly -- in a closed vehicle when it's hot outside.

Modify your eating habits, if necessary, away from two or three large meals to a greater number of light, well-balanced meals. And avoid alcoholic beverages.

Don't dress infants in heavy clothing or wrap them in blankets.

Check often on people who are older, ill or otherwise vulnerable to heat illness.

From Texas Health Matters

June 23, 2011 - SUMMER DANGER: Know the signs and prevention of heat exhaustion and stroke with this summer's intense humidity and heat. We all need to be more aware of the danger of heat. Heat exhaustion and heat stroke can occur when people work or play outside without replacing the fluids lost through normal sweating. Prevention is the best medicine.

The Health Corner: Healthcare provider issues heat warning

Written by Submitted by Robin Kent, PCA
Thursday, 30 June 2011 14:33 -

If you have to work in the heat, make sure you plan ahead for adequate fluids. Water and sports drinks should be always available. Drink fluids before, during and after outdoor activities. Avoid alcoholic beverages that can affect your body's ability to regulate temperature. Wear looser, lighter-colored clothing. Avoid sunburn- use sunscreens, hats or umbrellas. Spread outdoor activities into smaller time periods and avoid outdoors during the hottest part of the day. Work in the shade when possible. Be aware and watch out for the people working with you. Some medications make some people more susceptible to heat. Check with your medical provider. The elderly and young are at higher risk for heat injury. Heat exhaustion symptoms may come on suddenly or after days of heat exposure. They may include: sweating profusely, or pale, cool, moist skin; muscle pain or cramps; feeling dizzy or faint; headache, nausea or vomiting; extreme thirst; weakness or extreme fatigue; increased heart rate; and/or elevated temperature-usually greater than 100. Treatment for mild cases of heat exhaustion: Get out of the heat and sun - find a cool shaded area. Loosen or remove clothing, including caps or hats. Give cool fluids such as water or sports drinks. Apply cool water or water soaked rags to skin. Anyone who has suffered even mild heat exhaustion should stay in a cool environment and avoid strenuous activities for a few days. You should also reacclimate to the outdoor heat gradually. The next overheating won't take as long or as hot to occur. In some cases, heat related injury can permanently affect your ability to be outdoors. The term heat stroke is a life-threatening condition. The body's temperature can reach 105 degrees or more that can result in brain or internal organ damage. In Texas, several deaths occur every summer due to heat stroke. Symptoms may include: high body temperature (above 105); flushed, hot and dry skin; if it is hot and you have stopped sweating, that is not a good sign. Other symptoms can include confusion or altered mental state, unconsciousness; chest or abdominal pain; vomiting or inability to drink fluids.

Treatment of heat stroke is a 911 emergency. Do not hesitate to call 911. Do not attempt to treat at home. While waiting on medical assistance, get the victim to a cooler spot. If conscious place them in a cool bath of water. Offer cool beverages if person alert and can swallow or tolerate liquids.

Robin Kent, RN, PA-C

Primary Care Associates of Leonard