

Signs and Symptoms of Heat Illness



All of these signs and symptoms of heat illness should be followed up on by professional health care experts.

HEAT FATIGUE

A factor that could cause heat fatigue is lack of acclimatization. Acclimatization is simply someone who is used to the heat because their body has adjusted itself to working in high temperatures. The signs and symptoms of heat fatigue include impaired performance of skilled jobs, or not being able to pay attention. There is no treatment for heat fatigue except to remove the heat stress before a more serious heat-related condition develops.

HEAT RASHES

Heat rashes are the most common problem in hot work environments. Prickly heat is shows up as red rashes in areas where the clothing is restrictive. As sweating increases, these rashes give rise to a prickling sensation. Prickly heat occurs in skin that is always sweaty, and heat rash bumps may become infected if they are not treated. In most cases, heat rashes will disappear when the affected individual returns to a cool environment.

HEAT COLLAPSE, (FAINTING)

In heat collapse, the brain does not receive enough oxygen because blood pools in the arms and legs. As a result, the exposed individual may lose consciousness. This reaction is similar to that of heat exhaustion and doesn't affect the body's heat balance. However, the onset of heat collapse is rapid and unpredictable. To prevent heat collapse, the worker should gradually become acclimatized to the heat.

HEAT CRAMPS

Heat cramps are usually caused by hard physical labor in a hot environment. These cramps have been attributed to an electrolyte imbalance caused by sweating. It is important to understand that cramps can be caused by the lack of water replenishment. Thirst cannot be relied on as a guide to the need for water; instead, water must be taken every 15 to 20 minutes in hot environments. Under extreme conditions, such as working for 6 to 8 hours in heavy protective gear, a loss of sodium may occur. Recent studies have shown that drinking commercially available carbohydrate-electrolyte replacement liquids, (Gatorade or similar drinks) are effective.



HEAT EXHAUSTION

The signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion are headache, nausea, vertigo, weakness, thirst, and giddiness. Fortunately, this condition responds readily to prompt treatment. Heat exhaustion should not be taken lightly, however, for several reasons. One is that the fainting associated with heat exhaustion can be dangerous because the victim may be injured when he or she faints. Also, the signs and symptoms seen in heat exhaustion are similar to those of heat stroke which a medical emergency. Workers suffering from heat exhaustion should be removed from the hot environment and given fluid replacement. They should also be encouraged to get adequate rest.

HEAT STROKE

Heat stroke occurs when the body's system of temperature regulation fails and body temperature rises to critical levels. This condition is caused by a combination of factors, and very difficult to predict. Heat stroke is a medical emergency. The primary signs and symptoms of heat stroke are confusion; irrational behavior; loss of consciousness; convulsions; a lack of sweating (usually); hot, dry skin; and an abnormally high body temperature. If body temperature is too high, the individual will die. If a worker shows signs of possible heat stroke, professional medical treatment should be obtained immediately. The worker should be placed in a shady area and the outer clothing should be removed. The worker's skin should be wetted and air movement around the worker should be increased to improve evaporative cooling until professional methods of cooling are initiated and the seriousness of the condition can be assessed. Fluids should be replaced as soon as possible. The medical outcome of an episode of heat stroke depends on the victim's physical fitness and the timing and effectiveness of first aid treatment. Regardless of the worker's protests, (remember, they are irrational by this time), no employee suspected of being ill from heat stroke should be sent home or left unattended unless a physician has specifically approved such an order.