

# **HEAT** **STRESS**



## **What is Heat Stress?**

Heat stress is triggered by hot weather and can cause a variety of medical problems. When your body temperature rises just a few degrees above its normal temperature, you are at risk for heat stress. Individual susceptibility to heat stress varies so it is hard to predict who is at risk. Even healthy people are at risk and should take it easy during extremely hot temperatures. However, people with medical conditions such as hypertension or respiratory problems must be especially careful. Certain kinds of medicine can also affect how people react to excessive heat. Other factors affecting susceptibility to heat stress are weight, degree of physical fitness, degree of acclimatization, metabolism and use of alcohol and drugs.

## **Symptoms**

Heat stress has a number of possible symptoms including weakness, disorientation, illness, and dizziness. One sure-fire sign is prickly heat or heat rash, which is the first manifestation of heat stress. Prickly heat is visible as red papules and usually appears in areas where clothing is restrictive. As the sweating increases these papules begin to create a prickling sensation. Another symptom is heat cramps, which are muscular pains and spasms that occur as a result of the body losing electrolytes. They usually occur in the arms, legs, or abdomen. Heat collapse or fainting is another symptom that may occur as a result of heat stress. This condition is one of the most serious related to heat stress. This is often a precursor to a much more serious heat related disorder such as heat exhaustion or heat stroke, and the person who has collapsed may be hurt by the fall.

## **Prevention**

There are many measures that can be taken to prevent heat stress. One such preventative measure is to drink water frequently and before you become thirsty. Since sweating is one of the ways your body cools down, it is very important in the hot weather. However, sweating results in the loss of water, so to keep sweating and keep cool, you need to drink water frequently. Ideally, you should drink about 8 ounces of water every 20-30 minutes. Avoiding alcoholic beverages and eating a healthy diet is another way to help prevent heat stress. You should also wear loose fitting clothing made from a "breathable" fabric and when in the sun wear a hat. To prevent heat cramps, which are caused by the loss of electrolytes, you can drink one of the many electrolyte replacement drinks that are available. Most sports drinks will accomplish this. Also, since workers exposed to extreme heat will get used to their environment in about a week, you should gradually increase your work output over this week period and slowly become adapted to the heat. As an added precaution, whenever possible, physically demanding work done outside should be avoided during the hottest hours of the day between 10 am and 3 pm.

## **Emergency Response**

If you or someone you are working with is overcome by the heat, call University Police at 3333 then perform the following steps to make the victim more comfortable:

1. Get the victim out of the sun and into a cool, shaded area.
2. Give the victim plenty of fluids.

For further information about heat related injuries, contact the office of Environmental Health and Safety at 3796.