

Heat Illness

Of all the injuries/illnesses that can occur in athletics, Heat Illness is 100% preventable. Following good hydration principles, proper conditioning and being aware of the environmental conditions are all important components of preventing heat illness. There are several different types of heat illness and there is no clear-cut line that separates them. Once you recognize any of the signs or symptoms, action needs to be taken.

Prevention

- Obtain a thorough pre-participation exam to determine if you are at risk of having an Exertional Heat Illness.
 - Take time to become acclimatized to the environment (10-14 days).
 - Avoid working out in the hottest part of the day. If the temperature is too high try moving your workout indoors.
 - Drink adequate fluids prior to, during and after your workout.
 - Get adequate rest.
 - Wear light-colored clothing.
 - Take frequent rest breaks.
 - Recognize the signs of exertional heat illness and have an emergency plan available.
 - Have a way to cool your body rapidly in the event of an exertional heat illness.
 - Work out with a partner when you are in a hot and humid environment.

Types of Heat Illness

Below is a list of some common heat illnesses. They are listed in order from mild to severe. Without the appropriate treatment, they can progress quickly.

- Heat Cramps: Painful involuntary muscle contractions. Usually due to a fluid and salt imbalance.
- Heat Exhaustion: Most common form of heat illness in the physically active population. Usually occurs due to working in a hot humid environment, dehydration, poor fitness levels and obesity.
- Heat Stroke: The most serious of all heat illnesses. Can become life-threatening quickly if not treated appropriately. The body can no longer cool itself.

Signs and Symptoms

- Excessive Sweating
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Fainting
- Decreased performance
- Loss of/Altered Level of Consciousness

Treatment

- Remove equipment and unnecessary clothing
- Move to a cooler environment
- Provide cool fluids
- Monitor airway, breathing and circulation
- Attempt to cool down by the application of ice towels or submerging the individual in an ice bath
- Call 911 if the athlete becomes unconscious or does not improve with treatment

If you would like additional information regarding Heat Illness, email Carolinas HealthCare Sports Medicine at CHSSportsMedicine@carolinashealthcare.org