

Dehydration

We've been looking at various heat stress disorders that may affect us as the summer heat increases the temperature and humidity. During the summer, we must all take precautions to ensure our bodies don't get over heated.

Today we'll look at dehydration. Although it is technically not a heat disorder, it is certainly related.

Dehydration occurs when you lose more fluid than you take in and your body doesn't have enough water and other fluids to carry out its normal functions. If lost fluid remains un-replenished, you may suffer serious consequences.

Common causes of dehydration include vomiting, intense bouts of diarrhea, fever or excessive sweating. Inadequate intake of water during hot weather or exercise also may deplete your body's water stores. Anyone may become dehydrated, but young children, older adults and people with chronic illnesses are most at risk; as well those working in the heat.

Mild dehydration can cause symptoms such as:

- Dry, sticky mouth
- Sleepiness or tiredness
- Thirst
- Decreased or dark urine output
- Few or no tears when crying
- Muscle weakness
- Headache
- Dizziness or lightheadedness

Dehydration can be treated by replenishing the lost fluids your body has lost. When symptoms of dehydration are noticed, drink *at least* 32 ounces of water or sports drinks (or a combination of the two) slowly but steadily and rest.

Sports drinks are best when diluted with water at least by 50%. This reduces the sugars (and increases water intake) within the sports drinks while still allowing for the electrolytes to be absorbed.

These are some of the things you can do to reduce the possibility of heat related illnesses:

- Use fans to help cool down and circulate air
- Wear enough clothing to protect your skin from direct sunlight and prevent sunburn
- Drink plenty of fluids, but avoid or limit caffeinated beverages
- Perform the heaviest work during the coolest part of the day and take frequent breaks in cool, shaded areas.
- When possible, work in pairs and keep an eye on your partner. Watch for symptoms of heat related illnesses.
- Avoid eating large meals before working in hot environments