



Tips on how to stay cool

Heat, whether it's inside or outside, can be a health hazard. If you don't know when enough becomes too much, you can suffer from some form of heat stress. That can be a momentary problem or something more serious. And it can strike you down at work or at play. We try to keep conditions from getting unhealthy, but some jobs, such as welding or working in confined spaces, can get pretty hot. And some people are more easily affected by heat than others.

Workers exposed to hot and humid conditions are at risk of heat illness, especially those doing heavy work tasks or using bulky protective clothing and equipment. Some workers might be at greater risk than others if they have not built up a tolerance to hot conditions. The body normally cools itself by sweating. During hot weather, especially with high humidity, sweating isn't enough. Body temperature can rise to dangerous levels if precautions are not taken.

To remain healthy and be able to work efficiently, we must keep our body core temperature as close as possible to 98.6°F. As it drops below that, we begin to experience hypothermia and could eventually freeze to death— at about 80.6°F. When the core temperature climbs, rather than falling, and the body cannot be cooled by sweat, the condition is called hyperthermia, and the individual suffers some level of heat stress. If unrelieved, this can also be fatal. The dangers of heat are of greater concern than those of cold because in cold weather, we can always add more clothing, while in hot weather, there's a limit to how much can safely, let alone politely, be removed.

You can't always stay out of the heat, but you can stay out of trouble if you take some sensible precautions and know when you're at risk. Don't try to tough it out, but use a little sense when working outside on hot days—or indoors, where processes generate heat or air conditioning is inadequate. Sometimes, due to extreme heat, a person will faint, especially when standing still in the sun. So avoid standing in one place while working outdoors. If you do faint, though, lying down for a period of time—out of the sun—should help you recover. It's easier to talk cool than to stay cool some summer days, but heat illness can make you sick, put you in the hospital, even kill you.

Take precautions to prevent becoming a victim of heat, here are some precautions to take:

- Gradually adjust to a hot climate by working shorter hours at first and then increasing the time exposure and workload slowly over a period of days. Build up your exposure to the sun slowly.
- Try to stay in the shade or inside between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. when the sun is strongest.
- Take plenty of rest breaks in a cool area.
- Rest in the shade.
- When the temperature rises, drink plenty of water, sports drinks, or juices. Skip the alcohol, which places you at a higher risk for heat stroke, and ignore the heavy milk drinks that may turn your stomach in the heat.
- Summertime calls for a different type of diet, too. Fruits and lightly cooked vegetables make great summer fare and will help you replace some of the elements—sodium and potassium—you lose through sweating. Eat a regular well-balanced diet, but try to stay away from hot or heavy food. Also watch your salt consumption. Some people take salt tablets to replace the salt lost in perspiration when it's hot. But too much salt can be bad for you, so don't take salt tablets without a doctor's recommendation.
- Occasionally douse yourself with water.
- Wear appropriate clothing for the working conditions. Wear lightweight, loose fitting clothing, including a brimmed hat and sunglasses unless you are working around rotating equipment. Anyone working near furnaces or extremely hot metal should wear special personal protective equipment and keep skin exposure to a minimum.
- Apply all-day sunscreen to avoid sunburn. Cover as much of your body with clothing as possible. You can also get sunburned in cloudy weather. The sun is even more potent when it's reflected off water, concrete, or sand.
- Report heat symptoms early.
- Know what to do in an emergency – acting quickly can save lives!

Heat illness can be deadly. Every year, thousands of workers become sick from heat exposure on the job. Some of these workers even die. These illnesses and deaths are preventable.