

Heat Cramps, Exhaustion, Stroke

Three dangers of summertime are heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke. These are all manifestations of dehydration caused by excessive sweating.

Heat cramps

Heat cramps are the mildest of these three forms. It is characterized by severe cramping of the muscles, similar to what is seen with football players during a game. Treatment is straightforward. Give your child a cold glass of water every 15 minutes and put him or her in a cool shaded place. Heat cramps are rarely, if ever, serious and unless your child is showing some additional signs of distress, you do not need to contact your physician.

Heat exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a more serious form of heat stress. In heat exhaustion, the dehydration is somewhat more severe. Heat exhaustion is characterized by dizziness, fainting, normal body temperature and sweating.

If your child shows signs of heat exhaustion, you should:

- Call your physician's office immediately.
- Move your child to a cool, shady place.
- Give your child a cold glass of water every 15 minutes.
- Have your child lie down, and elevate his or her feet.

Your physician will undoubtedly want to see your child. If your physician agrees, you can transport the child in your own car. You should, however, continue to offer cold water every 15 minutes, and continue to have your child lie down in the back seat. If your physician does not want you to transport your child in your own car, or if you are uncomfortable doing so, call for emergency transportation (an ambulance).

Heatstroke

Heatstroke is the most severe form of heat stress. This is a medical emergency. It is characterized by:

- Fainting or prostration (unconsciousness)
- Severe confusion (delirium)
- Elevated temperature
- Lack of sweating

If your child shows the above symptoms, you should:

Call 9-1-1

If there is no emergency medical transportation system in your area, call the nearest hospital emergency room or your physician's office.

Cool your child off as quickly as possible. Sponge your child with cold water, or immerse him in a bathtub of cold water. The water should be as cold as he or she can tolerate. Rubbing your child with alcohol is not recommended.

Using acetaminophen or any other medication to bring the temperature down will not work.

If your child is conscious, give him or her a glass of cold water every 15 minutes and transport your child to the nearest emergency room.

As with all injuries and illnesses, prevention is the key. When your children are out in the heat, make sure that they have plenty to drink. Water is the best liquid to give to any child in the heat. Cool water is better than warm water. Despite what your high school coach might have told you, salt tablets are not a good idea. When your child sweats, he or she loses some salt, but mostly loses water. Salt tablets will actually slow the absorption of water and can make dehydration worse.