



**American  
Red Cross**

*Together, we can save a life*

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## ***News Release***

### **For Immediate Release**

### **Preventing Heat-Related Illnesses**

*Note: American Red Cross instructor and associate director of Health & Safety, Joanne Levine, can provide more information on the prevention of heat-related illnesses. To schedule an interview, contact Buffy Caudell at 336-724-0511 or [buffy.caudell@nwnc-redcross.org](mailto:buffy.caudell@nwnc-redcross.org)*

**WINSTON-SALEM, NC, July 21, 2005** – Red Cross instructors stress the importance of preventing heat-related illnesses in First Aid classes every day, but now, with temperatures and the humidity climbing steadily, it is especially pertinent. Heat-related illness can become serious or even deadly if left unattended. Sweat (perspiration) is the body's way of keeping itself cool; if the body does not cool properly or does not cool enough, the person may suffer heat-related illness. Although anyone is susceptible to heat-related illnesses, the very young and old are at greater risk. The main cause of heat-related illness is not replenishing the fluids your body loses when you sweat. You can avoid heat-related illness this summer by following these simple tips:

- Dress for the heat, wearing light-colored and lightweight clothing to reflect the sun's energy.
- Drink water, even if you don't feel thirsty. Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Eat small meals and eat more often, avoiding foods high in protein because they will increase metabolic heat.
- Don't use salt tablets unless directed to do so by your physician.
- Slow down and avoid strenuous activity.
- Stay indoors when possible.

In addition to being able to prevent heat-related illnesses, one should also be able to recognize heat-

related illnesses in others. Heat-related illness is a process that becomes increasingly more dangerous as the stages advance. In the first stage, a person may experience heat cramps. These cramps are likely the result of fluid and salt loss from heavy sweating. The muscles should be stretched and massaged while the person drinks water or a sports drink.

The second stage, heat exhaustion, is more serious. Victims may complain of a headache, dizziness or nausea and sweat profusely. Remove the victim from the sun, lie him or her down and give him or her sips of water or sports drink every few minutes. “Heat exhaustion is less dangerous than a heat stroke and typically occurs when people exercise heavily or work in a warm, humid place where body fluids are lost through heavy sweating” says Red Cross instructor, Joanne Levine. Fluid loss causes blood flow to decrease in the vital organs, resulting in a form of shock. With heat exhaustion, sweat does not evaporate as it should, possibly because of high humidity or too many layers of clothing. As a result, the body is not cooled properly. Signals include cool, moist, pale, flushed or red skin; heavy sweating; headache; nausea or vomiting; dizziness; and exhaustion. Body temperature will remain near normal.

The final, potentially deadly, stage is heat stroke. Heat stroke occurs when the body can no longer properly cool itself. The person will cease sweating, have an extremely high temperature and may lose consciousness. Help is needed fast, so you should immediately call 9-1-1. While waiting for the EMS to arrive, you should loosen the victim’s clothing and quickly move the person to a cooler place. Wrap wet sheets around the body and fan it. If you have ice packs or cold packs, wrap them in a cloth and place them on each of the victim's wrists and ankles, in the armpits and on the neck to cool the large blood vessels. (Do not use rubbing alcohol because it closes the skin's pores and prevents heat loss.) Watch for signals of breathing problems and make sure the airway is clear. You should also keep the person lying down.

The summer months can be very enjoyable if you remember to take the proper precautions. Take regular breaks when outdoors on warm days and watch for signs of heat-related illness in yourself and others. For more information on how to stay safe this summer, visit us on line at [www.nwnc-redcross.org](http://www.nwnc-redcross.org).

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