

## SPECIAL EDITION:

# BEAT THE HEAT!

## HEAT MAY BE INEVITABLE...

Summer's combination of high temperatures and humidity can be more than uncomfortable – it can threaten your health by leading to dehydration, heat exhaustion or a potentially deadly condition known as heat stroke. In an average year, hundreds of Americans die from heat-related illnesses. During extreme or extended heat waves, the toll can double.

Even on a cool day, our bodies have to work at staying cool, because we generate heat as a byproduct of our metabolism (digesting food to create energy, activities that “burn” calories, etc.) To prevent over-heating, our bodies constantly get rid of excess heat, mostly through our skin. This requires circulation of blood to our skin, where heat can be released from the skin's surface. The air must be cooler than our blood, so the heat transfers from our bodies to the cooler air surrounding us... even better with air movement, such as a cool breeze. When air temperature approaches body temperature, or when exercise sends our body temp soaring, we must perspire to release body heat, and the evaporation of sweat cools us... unless humidity of the surrounding air slows or stops that evaporation.

While mental irritability is the most common reaction when we “over-heat”, there are three medical conditions that are truly dangerous:

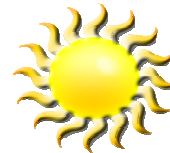
- **Heat cramps** signal dehydration severe enough to deprive muscles of the extra oxygen they need to exercise. The remedy: slow down, drink cool water, stretch out and gently massage tight muscles, and get out of the heat!
- **Heat exhaustion:** heat cramps are painful but not life-threatening, because the body temperature is normal even though muscles are in spasm. But in heat exhaustion body temperature is often above 103° -- that can lead to weakness, headache, nausea, and loss of concentration that impairs judgment, so you may not recognize what is happening. Be aware that confusion, sweating, and flushed clammy skin are tip-offs. Move quickly to a cool place; remove clothing and apply ice packs or cool wet towels; drink cool fluids (don't force someone who is weak and confused to drink too much too quickly!)
- **Heat stroke** typically affects elderly people who stay indoors without air conditioning or fans. If you are “very young or very old”, are overweight or have a chronic medical condition such as diabetes, you're

particularly vulnerable! Heat stroke is a medical emergency – while it may initially look like heat exhaustion, its symptoms are more severe and they progress more quickly, leading to delirium, stupor, unconsciousness and seizures (convulsions). Body temp may exceed 105°. Heat stroke kills because it damages the heart, liver, kidneys, brain and blood clotting system. Survival depends on getting quick, aggressive medical care – until paramedics arrive, remove clothing, immerse in (or spray with) cold water and turn on a strong fan!

## ...BUT HEAT - RELATED ILLNESS IS NOT!

A few simple precautions can protect you and those around you from becoming a seasonal statistic.

- Get out of the heat! An air-conditioned room is best, but even a fan will help. If you can't cool your own home, find a friend or relative to stay with.
- Stay out of the sun and avoid the midday heat as much as possible; wear light-weight, light-colored, loosely fitting clothes.
- Don't exercise when it's hot and humid; slow down – walk instead of jogging, or use a cart instead of walking the golf course; take breaks often and quit early.
- Above all, listen to your body: muscle cramps, fatigue, weakness, impaired concentration, lightheadedness, nausea, chest discomfort due to labored breathing or rapid or irregular pulse are signs of trouble!
- Drink up! Stay hydrated by drinking lots of water, and avoiding alcohol and sources of caffeine. Don't wait until you are thirsty to hydrate – at this point, you are already dehydrated
- Remember to check on friends and neighbors – especially older ones or those who live alone!



## PROVIDE A COOLING CENTER IN YOUR COMMUNITY!

During extremely hot or humid days, folks without air conditioning are at continued risk for heat related illness. They may seek refuge at a friend's home, a mall, a movie theater, a local library... or a community “cooling center” – an air-conditioned building where they can sit down, drink some cool beverages and take a break from the heat.

Your church can become a cooling center for your community if you can provide (1)air conditioning, (2)drinking water, (3)restrooms, and (4)seating space. Call your local public health department or county emergency preparedness team for the name and phone number of local cooling center contact(s) for more details!

## It's a cool thing to do!

*“I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink...”*  
**Matt. 25: 35**

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