

Splurge - Volume 6 Issue 8 (August 2011)

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CARING FOR YOUR BODY IN THE HEAT

Another Kansas summer is upon us, and we've encountered record-breaking heat. Many of my patients and friends have wondered if the heat can negatively affect their health, especially my patients with cardiovascular disease.

Extreme heat can devastate the environment and our bodies as well. When temperatures soar into triple digits – especially for several days in a row – people can all too easily overexert, under-hydrate and be somewhat cavalier about the heat. Those caregivers of young children and sick or elderly folks should be even more proactive about protecting their loved ones. Heat can cause or exacerbate existing conditions. Below, I detail a few ways heat can adversely (and possibly fatally) affect the body.

Heat stroke can occur in extreme conditions rather rapidly, so you must take precautions. Heat stroke occurs when the body is unable to regulate temperature. As the body temperature rises quickly, and the sweating mechanism fails, body temperature can rise to 105 degrees and higher within 15-20 minutes. At this stage, emergency care must be taken. Heat stroke can cause disability or even death if not medically treated.

SIGNS OF HEAT STROKE MAY INCLUDE:

Red, hot, dry skin

Rapid, strong pulse rate

Intense, throbbing headache

Nausea

Extremely high body temperature (103 or above)

Confusion or hallucinations

Unconsciousness

Seizure

Those at highest risk for heat-related illnesses are the elderly, infants and anyone (including children) with a history of neurological or cardiovascular issues. If you see someone in this state, call 911, and try to cool them off – move them to the shade or indoors, cool their skin with cold water or wrap them in cool, wet sheets and be sure to monitor body temperature until medical personnel arrive.

A slightly less dangerous heat-related illness is commonly referred to as heat exhaustion. This can develop over a series of days, and is generally related to exposure to heat and sun and inadequate hydration. Again, elderly folks are a risk, as well as people with high blood pressure, diabetics and those working or exercising in high temperatures.

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO BEAT THE HEAT:

Always wear sunscreen, including a high SPF lip protection.

Make sure you apply lotion to children and reapply after swimming or exercising.

Wear sunglasses, hats and visors. Take a cue from golfers-the shade protects the delicate tissues of the eyes, mouth, scalp and ears. Always make sure to shade your infant's head and dress them (and yourself) in loose, cool clothing.

Stay hydrated. Try to drink at least 6-8 glasses of water. Lower your caffeine intake and keep alcohol consumption to a minimum.

Stay indoors or in the shade. Minimizing the amount of time in the sun is the best bet. Use air-conditioning or fans whenever possible.

Make the most of your summer: have fun with family and friends, laze away an afternoon or two and always make sure to take your health to heart.

Listen to Dr. Galichia's Radio Show – "Take Your Health to Heart" every Saturday from 11 AM to Noon on 1480 KQAM in Wichita. If you have any medically related questions, please call us during the LIVE broadcast at 1-800-TALK-997 or 1-800-825-5997. You can also e-mail your questions anytime to

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