



How to Beat Extreme Heat

Extreme heat events pose a growing health risk in Canada as a result of climate change. When faced with a hot environment, the body normally cools itself by sweating. However, extreme heat conditions can overload the body's temperature control system.

When the humidity is high, sweat will not evaporate as quickly, preventing the body from releasing heat quickly and cooling itself. In such cases, a person's body temperature rises rapidly. Very high body temperatures may damage the brain or other vital organs.

Four environmental factors work together to make it hot enough to put health at risk.

- High temperature
- High relative humidity (i.e. air moisture content)
- Radiant heat (mostly from the sun)
- Wind speed (Lack of air movement)

Tips for Preventing Heat-Related Illnesses

Drink Plenty of Fluids

- Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink.
- Increase your fluid intake, regardless of your activity level.
- Water is the best choice of liquids.
- Don't drink liquids that contain alcohol, or large amounts of sugar—these actually cause you to lose more body fluid.
- Avoid very cold drinks, because they can cause stomach cramps.



Heavy sweating removes salt and minerals from the body. These are necessary for your body and must be replaced. If you are required to work or exercise in the heat, drink two to four glasses of cool, non-alcoholic fluids each hour (water is recommended). In certain situations, where there is prolonged sweating or exercise, a low-calorie sports beverage can help replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat. Warning: If you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage.

Wear Appropriate Clothing and Sunscreen

- Choose lightweight, light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat along with sunglasses.
- Put on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher 20 minutes before going outside (the most effective products say "broad spectrum" or "UVA/UVB protection" on their labels).
- Continue to reapply sunscreen according to the package directions.

Schedule Outdoor Activities Carefully

- If you must be outdoors, try to limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours.
- Try to rest often in shady areas, indoors, or use a sun umbrella.

Pace Yourself

- If you are not accustomed to working or exercising in a hot environment, start slowly and gradually pick up the pace.
- If exertion in the heat makes your heart race and leaves you gasping for breath, lightheaded, or confused, STOP all activity. Get into a cool indoor area, or at least into the shade, and rest.

Stay Cool Indoors

- If at all possible, stay in an air-conditioned place.
- If your home does not have air conditioning, go to the shopping mall or public library—even a few hours spent in air conditioning can help your body stay cooler when you go back into the heat.

- Electric fans may provide comfort, but when the temperature is in the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat-related illness. Taking a cool shower or bath or moving to an air-conditioned place is a much better way to cool off.
- Try not to use your stove or oven.
- If it is sunny, keep your house cooler by keeping the curtains/blinds closed and the lights turned off.
- If you have a two-storey house, open the upper-level windows slightly to draw excess heat up and out.

Monitor Those at High Risk

- If you know someone 65 years of age or older, check on them at least twice a day. If you are in this age group, have a friend or relative call to check on you twice a day during a heat wave.
- Infants and young children are especially sensitive to the effects of high temperatures, and they rely on others to regulate their environments and provide adequate liquids.
- People who are overweight tend to retain more body heat, and as a result may be prone to heat sickness.
- People who are physically ill, especially with heart disease or high blood pressure, or who take certain medications, are more likely to be affected by extreme heat.
- When working in the heat, monitor the condition of your co-workers and have someone do the same for you.

Do Not Leave Children or Pets in Cars

- Even with the windows cracked open, interior temperatures can rise almost 20 degrees Fahrenheit within the first 10 minutes.
- Children who are left unattended in parked cars are at greatest risk for heat stroke, and possibly death.
- When leaving your car, check to be sure everyone is out of the car. Do not overlook any children who have fallen asleep in the car.



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Heat-Related Illnesses



Knowing the symptoms of heat-related illnesses will allow you to provide proper first aid treatment. If recognized early and treated properly, a mild illness can be cured and prevented from progressing to something more severe. Here is a list of heat-related illnesses in order of severity.

! Heat Cramps

Heat cramps cause **spasms of the muscles in the legs and abdominal area**, usually affecting people who sweat a lot during strenuous activity. The heavy sweating depletes the body's salt and moisture. Anyone who experiences these cramping symptoms needs to drink water or a sport drink, rest in a cool area, and gently stretch and massage the affected muscles.

!! Heat Syncope (fainting)

Anyone who **faints or experiences near-fainting** needs to be placed in a cool shady area immediately and be given water or a sport drink to cool down their body temperature.

!!! Heat Exhaustion

The symptoms of heat exhaustion include **fatigue, weakness, reduced energy, dizziness, headache, nausea, rapid pulse, and heavy sweating**. Anyone who experiences these symptoms needs to seek medical attention immediately. Immediate treatment includes drinking water or a sport drink, getting out of the heat and into a shady area, removing any excess clothing, and placing ice packs or cold wet towels to the neck, armpit, and groin area.

!!!! Heat Stroke

Anyone experiencing **confusion, disorientation, loss of consciousness, red, hot, dry skin, or seizures** is in an emergency state and needs immediate medical attention. This person must be taken to the nearest hospital. Immediate treatment includes moving the person to a cool or shady place, removing excess clothing, cooling the victim using cold, wet sheets or towels, and applying ice packs to the neck, armpit, and groin area.