
First Aid: Heat Exposure

The brain has a temperature regulator that keeps the body near a healthy 98°F (37°C). But prolonged exposure to extreme heat may overwhelm this natural thermostat. Young children and the elderly are at greatest risk.

The effects of heat

Intense heat may cause extra fluid loss through sweating (heat exhaustion). If the body isn't cooled, sweating eventually stops, but the body's temperature may keep rising until vital organs start to fail (heat stroke).

Step 1. Lower body temperature

- Move the person into shade and sponge them with cool water. Cool the head, neck, groin, and underarms.
- Remove any extra clothing.
- Place the person on their back. Raise their feet about 12 inches to lower the risk for shock.
- Don't leave the person alone. Monitor their condition and mental status every 15 minutes. Continue to cool them as needed.

Step 2. Give cool liquids

- Give the person clear liquids if they are alert, but not drowsy or confused. Offer cool or room-temperature water. A bottled sports drink is another good choice.
- Don't offer drinks with milk because they may cause nausea.
- Don't offer drinks with caffeine or alcohol because these may make dehydration worse.

When to seek medical help

Seek medical help if any of the following is true:

- The person is sweating heavily, but the skin feels cool and clammy.
- The person feels dizzy, lightheaded, or weak.

Call 911

Call 911 right away if they have any of the following:

- Skin that feels hot and dry to the touch
- Drowsiness, disorientation, fainting, or loss of consciousness
- Loss of muscle control or a seizure

While you wait for help:

- Reassure the person. **Don't** give them anything to drink if they are drowsy or confused.
- Keep the person as cool as possible.
- Treat them for shock or do rescue breathing or CPR, if needed.