

## How can you avoid heat stress?

During heat waves, use common sense to stay cool. It also is important to help others, especially the elderly and young children. The following are important guidelines to follow in excessive heat:

- Drink two to five times more than usual amounts of water and sugar-free, non-alcoholic beverages to replace fluids lost in perspiration.
- Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, light-colored clothing and wide-brimmed hats while in the sun.
- Use sunscreens with an SPF 15 rating or higher.
- Take frequent breaks from physical activity. If warning signs, such as a pounding heart and shortness of breath occur, stop to rest in a cool place.
- Stay in an air-conditioned area if possible. People who lack air conditioning at home should spend the hot hours of the day in air-conditioned places. If no air conditioning is available, fans are helpful.
- Use a buddy system between coworkers in high heat-stress jobs.

People age 65 or older should have a friend or relative check on them or call twice daily during a heat wave.

When planning activities, choose cooler hours to be outdoors. Listen to weather forecasts before prolonged work or exercise away from air conditioning. Forecasters often predict both the heat and the humidity and give special heat warnings.



# Sweating out a Texas Heat Wave

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*A guide to preventing  
hot weather illnesses*

Hot weather is a part of life in Texas, but long stretches of record-breaking heat and drought are extraordinary.

During these prolonged heat waves, the risk of heat-related illnesses, injuries and deaths climbs dramatically.

### What is the danger?

According to health experts, one of the most dangerous factors during excessively hot weather is the addition of humidity. The combination of heat and humidity results in heat stress on humans and animals by interfering with the body's ability to cool itself through sweating. People exposed to prolonged or high heat stress can develop heat cramps or heat exhaustion. If heat stress continues, the condition can progress to heat stroke or death.

### What are heat illness symptoms?

The warning signs of heat illness can be mild or severe, but all are important danger signals. The most serious heat-related conditions are heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Signs of heat exhaustion include:

- Profuse sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle cramps
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Weak, but rapid pulse
- Fast and shallow breathing
- Fainting

### Heat exhaustion can progress to heat stroke.

Heat stroke occurs when the body's cooling system fails. Sweating stops, and the body temperature can quickly exceed 106 degrees Fahrenheit. Heat stroke symptoms include:

- Extremely high body temperature (Usually more than 105 degrees Fahrenheit orally)
- Red and dry skin
- Failure to sweat
- Rapid pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Seizures
- Unconsciousness

Coma, paralysis and death can follow if emergency treatment is not immediately provided.



### Who is most at risk?

Prolonged or intense heat stress can be fatal to anyone, but people older than age 60 appear to have the highest risk for death from heat illness, especially if they are frail, have pre-existing heart disease, respiratory problems or diabetes. To a lesser extent, babies and young children (especially those left unattended in cars or enclosures), people with a history of alcoholism, and others using certain drugs and medications are at high risk of heat illness.

People most at risk of heat illness from exertion may include athletes, military personnel, manual laborers, farm workers, and people who have diabetes or are obese. Anyone who is not accustomed to high temperatures and humidity may become ill during exertion.

### How can you help someone with heat illness?

If a person shows signs of heat exhaustion, help them to gradually cool off with water or nonalcoholic, caffeine-free drinks. Other treatments may include cool showers, rest in an air-conditioned place and wearing less clothing. If a person shows signs of heat stroke, get them into shade or a cooler area, call 911 for emergency medical service, and use any means to start cooling such as immersing in cool water, spraying with a garden hose or vigorously fanning. Continue cooling efforts until his/her temperature drops to 101-102 degrees Fahrenheit. If emergency personnel have not arrived, call a hospital for advice. Get medical help as soon as possible.