

Causes of Heat Stress

High temperatures and humidity stress the body's ability to cool itself, and heat illness becomes a special concern during hot weather. Employees are responsible for wearing and maintaining hearing protective devices as instructed. Employees exposed to excessive levels of noise must also participate in annual training programs and the medical surveillance program which includes audiometric testing.

Forms of Heat Illness and Preventions

There are three major forms of heat illnesses: **heat cramps**, **heat exhaustion**, and **heat stroke**, with heat stroke being a life threatening condition.

Heat Cramps

Heat cramps are muscle spasms which usually affect the arms, legs, or stomach. Frequently they don't occur until sometime later after work, at night, or when relaxing. Heat cramps are caused by heavy sweating, especially when water is replaced by drinking, but not salt or potassium. Although heat cramps can be quite painful, they usually don't result in permanent damage. To prevent them, drink electrolyte solutions such as Gatorade during the day and try eating more fruits like bananas.

What to do: If you have heart problems or are on a low sodium diet, get medical attention. If medical attention is not necessary, take these steps:

- Stop all activity, and sit quietly in a cool place
- Drink clear juice or a sports beverage
- Do not return to strenuous activity for a few hours after the cramps subside
- Seek medical attention for heat cramps if they do not subside in 1 hour

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is more serious than heat cramps. It occurs when the body's internal air-conditioning system is overworked, but hasn't completely shut down. In heat exhaustion, the surface blood vessels and capillaries which originally enlarged to cool the blood collapse from loss of body fluids and necessary minerals. This happens when you don't drink enough fluids to replace what you're sweating away.

