

Survive the heat with planning - and a bottle of water

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(PhysOrg.com) -- With temperatures getting fierce in many parts of the country, there are steps you can take to beat the heat.

Dr. James Muntz, an internal medicine and sports medicine physician at The Methodist Hospital in Houston, says it's important to prepare for the [heat](#), particularly if you plan to work or play outdoors.

"Drink water before you go outdoors, so you can be properly hydrated when you begin activity," says Muntz. "But if you plan to be active in the heat for an hour or more, water may not be enough - sports drinks, or electrolyte drinks, are a good supplement."

[Sports drinks](#) contain electrolytes, like potassium and magnesium to help replace salt and water lost in sweat when exercising heavily.

"Carbohydrates, sodium and potassium help move fluids out of the body and to the muscles, where it needs to be when we are working out in the heat," Muntz explains.

Drinking too much water in a short period of time can lead to a condition called hyponatremia, which occurs when sodium levels drop in the body. Muntz suggests raising sodium levels after activity by eating some food with salt, such as pretzels, pickles or even potato chips.

Symptoms of hyponatremia include vomiting, loss of appetite, headache, restlessness/fatigue, confusion or hallucinations, [muscle weakness](#) and convulsions.

Other tips on coping with the heat:

- Make sure you are sweating properly. If you stop sweating when you are exercising you are dehydrated.
- If you realize your pulse rate in the morning is 10 to 15 beats higher than your normal rate, you should take the day off from exercising. Normal pulse rate is around 70-90/ minute.
- Get acclimated to the heat before you begin an exercise regimen. Start off with 15 minutes and slowly work your way up to 45 or an hour.
- Forget about the "no pain, no gain" mantra. Recognize warning signs and take the appropriate action immediately.
- Avoid exercising between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., the hottest part of the day.
- Don't try to diet by sweating. It will only result in water loss, not true weight loss.
- Wear loose-fitting, light-colored clothing, and sunscreen.

Once you are indoors:

- Use box fans and ceiling fans to create air circulation throughout your house.
- Wet towels on your head can help cool you down. Try pointing a fan across a tray of ice or cool water.
- Take cool shower or bath.

- Stay downstairs - since hot air rises, the upper stories of a home will be warmer than the ground floor.
- Consider replacing your incandescent light bulbs, which generate heat. Turn off your computer when you're not using it, as it also puts off heat.
- Eat fresh foods that don't require you to turn on the stove or oven.
- Avoid large meals, which increase your metabolism and body heat.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages and caffeine, which can dehydrate you.
- Check frequently on the elderly and shut-ins. Never leave a child or a pet in a closed, parked vehicle.
- Know the symptoms of heat illness: cool/clammy skin, excessive perspiration, muscle spasms or cramps, rapid pulse, paleness and nausea. Call emergency services (911) in case of a heat emergency and try to cool the victim until help arrives.

Provided by Methodist Hospital Research Institute

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