

Sports Medicine: Heat Stress and Athletic Participation

Heat Stress and Athletic Participation

Early fall football, cross country, soccer and field hockey practices are conducted in very hot and humid weather in many parts of the United States. Due to the equipment and uniform needed in football, most of the heat problems have been associated with football. From 1995 through the 2005 football season there have been 19 high school heat stroke deaths in football. This is not acceptable. There are no excuses for heatstroke deaths, if the proper precautions are taken. During hot weather conditions the athlete is subject to the following:

HEAT CRAMPS – Painful cramps involving abdominal muscles and extremities caused by intense, prolonged exercise in the heat and depletion of salt and water due to profuse sweating.

HEAT SYNCOPE – Weakness fatigue and fainting due to loss of salt and water in sweat and exercise in the heat. Predisposes to heat stroke.

HEAT EXHAUSTION (WATER DEPLETION) – Excessive weight loss, reduced sweating, elevated skin and core body temperature, excessive thirst, weakness, headache and sometimes unconsciousness.

HEAT EXHAUSTION (SALT DEPLETION) – Exhaustion, nausea, vomiting, muscle cramps, and dizziness due to profuse sweating and inadequate replacement of body salts.

HEAT STROKE – An acute medical emergency related to thermoregulatory failure. Associated with nausea, seizures, disorientation, and possible unconsciousness or coma. It may occur suddenly without being preceded by any other clinical signs. The individual is usually unconscious with a high body temperature and a hot dry skin (heat stroke victims, contrary to popular belief, may sweat profusely).

It is believed that the above-mentioned heat stress problems can be controlled provided certain precautions are taken. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Sports Medicine, heat related illnesses are all preventable. (Sports Medicine: Health Care for Young Athletes, American Academy of Pediatrics, July 2000). The following practices and precautions are recommended:

1. Each athlete should have a physical examination with a medical history when first entering a program and an annual health history update. History of previous heat illness and type of training activities before organized practice begins should be included. State High School Associations recommendations should be followed.
2. It is clear that top physical performance can only be achieved by an athlete who is in top physical condition. Lack of physical fitness impairs the performance of an athlete who participates in high temperatures. Coaches should know the **PHYSICAL CONDITION** of their athletes and set practice schedules accordingly.
3. Along with physical conditioning the factor of acclimatization to heat is important. Acclimatization is the process of becoming adjusted to heat and it is essential to provide for **GRADUAL ACCLIMATIZATION TO HOT WEATHER**. It is necessary for an athlete to exercise in the heat if he/she is to become acclimatized to it. It is suggested that a graduated physical conditioning program be used and that 80% acclimatization can be expected to occur after the first 7-10 days. Final stages of acclimatization to heat are marked by increased sweating and reduced salt concentration in the sweat.
4. The old idea that water should be withheld from athletes during workouts has **NO SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATION**. The most important safeguard to the health of the athlete is the replacement of water. Water must be on the field and readily available to the athletes at all times. It is recommended that a minimum 10-minute water break be scheduled for every twenty minutes of heavy exercise in the heat. Athletes should rest in a shaded area during the break. **WATER SHOULD BE AVAILABLE IN UNLIMITED QUANTITIES**.
5. Check and be sure athletes are drinking the water. Replacement by thirst alone is inadequate. Test the air prior to practice or game using a wet bulb, globe, temperature index (WBGT index) which is based on the combined effects of air temperature, relative humidity, radiant heat and air movement. The following precautions are recommended when using the WBGT Index: (ACSM's Guidelines for the Team Physician, 1991)

Below 65 – Unlimited activity

65-73– Moderate risk

73-82 – High risk

82 plus – Very high risk

6. An alternative method for assessing heat and humidity is the weather guide or heat index. Refer to the Sports Medicine Handbook section on heat related illness published by the NFHS. Figure I is an example of a heat-humidity index table that defines low, moderate, high, and extreme risk zones.

7. Cooling by evaporation is proportional to the area of the skin exposed. In extremely hot and humid weather reduce the amount of clothing covering the body as much as possible. **NEVER USE RUBBERIZED CLOTHING.**

8. Athletes should weigh each day before and after practice and **WEIGHT CHARTS CHECKED**. Generally a 3 percent weight loss through sweating is safe and over a 3 percent weight loss is in the danger zone. Over a 3 percent weight loss the athlete should not be allowed to practice in hot and humid conditions. Observe the athletes closely under all conditions. Do not allow athletes to practice until they have adequately replaced their weight.

9. Observe athletes carefully for signs of trouble, particularly athletes who lose significant weight and the eager athlete who constantly competes at his/her capacity. Some trouble signs are nausea, incoherence, fatigue, weakness, vomiting, cramps, weak rapid pulse, visual disturbance and unsteadiness.

10. Teams that encounter hot weather during the season through travel or following an unseasonably cool period, should be physically fit but will not be environmentally fit. Coaches in this situation should follow the above recommendations and substitute more frequently during games.

11. Know what to do in case of an emergency and have your emergency plans written with copies to all your staff. Be familiar with immediate first aid practice and prearranged procedures for obtaining medical care, including ambulance service.

12. Warn your athletes about the use of any products that contain ephedra. Ephedra has been associated with two heat stroke deaths in athletes. Ephedra speeds metabolism and increases body heat, constricts the blood vessels in the skin preventing the body from cooling itself, and by making the user feel more energetic it keeps him/her exercising longer when they should stop. Do not use ephedra or ephedra products.

HEAT STROKE – THIS IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY – DELAY COULD BE FATAL. Immediately cool body while waiting for transfer to a hospital. Remove clothing and immerse torso in ice/cold water. Immersion therapy has the best cooling rates. A plastic baby pool can be available at all practices and games, and can always be ready for immersion procedures. If not available apply ice packs in armpits, groin and neck areas. Continue cooling efforts until EMS arrives.

HEAT EXHAUSTION – OBTAIN MEDICAL CARE AT ONCE. Cool body as you would for heat stroke while waiting for transfer to hospital. Give fluids if athlete is able to swallow and is conscious.

SUMMARY – The main problem associated with exercising in the hot weather is water loss through sweating. Water loss is best replaced by allowing the athlete unrestricted access to water. Water breaks two or three times every hour are better than one break an hour. Probably the best method is to have water available at all times and to allow the athlete to drink water whenever he/she needs it. Never restrict the amount of water an athlete drinks, and be sure the athletes are drinking the water. The small amount of salt lost in sweat is adequately replaced by salting food at meals. Talk to your medical personnel concerning emergency treatment plans.

Author: Unknown
Release Date: 3/1/2005



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HYDRATION TO PREVENT HEAT ILLNESS



TYPES OF SPORTS DRINKS

◆ Fluid Replacers

- Examples: Water, Gatorade, 10K, Quickkick, Max
- These drinks are absorbed as quickly as water and typically are used for activities lasting less than 2 hours.

◆ Carbohydrate loaders

- Examples: Gatorlode, Exceed High, Carboplex
- These drinks replace more muscle glycogen to enhance greater endurance.
- They should be used after ultra-endurance events to increase muscle glycogen resynthesis after exercise.

◆ Nutrition Supplements

- Examples: Gatorpro, Exceed Sports, Ultra Energy
- These supplements are fortified with vitamins and minerals and they help athletes maintain a balanced diet.
- They can be used as a meal replacement supplement for athletes who wish to skip a high fat meal, or as extra calories for athletes who wish to gain weight.



WHAT NOT TO DRINK

- ◆ Drinks with Carbohydrate (CHO) concentrations of greater than eight percent should be avoided.
- ◆ Fruit juices, CHO gels, sodas, and sports drinks that have a CHO greater than six to eight percent are not recommended during exercise as sole beverages.
- ◆ Beverages containing caffeine, alcohol, and carbonation are not to be used because of the high risk of dehydration associated with excess urine production, or decreased voluntary fluid intake.

HYDRATION TIPS AND FLUID GUIDELINES

- ◆ Drink according to a schedule based on individual fluid needs.
- ◆ Drink before, during and after practices and games.
- ◆ Drink 17-20 ounces of water or sports drinks with six to eight percent CHO, two to three hours before exercise.
- ◆ Drink another 7-10 ounces of water or sport drink 10 to 20 minutes before exercise.
- ◆ Drink early — By the time you're thirsty, you're already dehydrated.
- ◆ In general, every 10-20 minutes drink at least 7-10 ounces of water or sports drink to maintain hydration, and remember to drink beyond your thirst.
- ◆ Drink fluids based on the amount of sweat and urine loss.
- ◆ Within two hours, drink enough to replace any weight loss from exercise.
- ◆ Drink approximately 20-24 ounces of sports drink per pound of weight loss.
- ◆ Dehydration usually occurs with a weight loss of two percent of body weight or more.

WHAT TO DRINK DURING EXERCISE

- ◆ If exercise lasts more than 45-50 minutes or is intense, a sports drink should be provided during the session.
- ◆ The carbohydrate concentration in the ideal fluid replacement solution should be in the range of six to eight percent CHO.
- ◆ During events when a high rate of fluid intake is necessary to sustain hydration, sports drinks with less than seven percent CHO should be used to optimize fluid delivery. These sports drinks have a faster gastric emptying rate and thus aid in hydration.
- ◆ Sports drinks with a CHO content of 10 percent have a slow gastric emptying rate and contribute to dehydration and should be avoided during exercise.
- ◆ Fluids with salt (sodium chloride) are beneficial to increasing thirst and voluntary fluid intake as well as offsetting the amount of fluid lost with sweat.
- ◆ Salt should never be added to drinks, and salt tablets should be avoided.
- ◆ Cool beverages at temperatures between 50 to 59 degrees Fahrenheit are recommended for best results with fluid replacement.

DEHYDRATION, ITS EFFECTS ON PERFORMANCE, AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO HEAT ILLNESS

- ◆ Dehydration can affect an athlete's performance in less than an hour of exercise — sooner if the athlete begins the session dehydrated.
- ◆ Dehydration of just one to two percent of body weight (only 1.5-3 lb.. for a 150-pound athlete) can negatively influence performance.
- ◆ Dehydration of greater than three percent of body weight increases an athlete's risk of heat illness (heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat stroke).
- ◆ High-body-fat athletes can have a harder time with exercise and can become dehydrated faster than lower-body-fat athletes working out under the same environmental conditions.
- ◆ Poor acclimatization/fitness levels can greatly contribute to an athlete's dehydration problems.
- ◆ Medications/fevers greatly affect an athlete's dehydration problems.
- ◆ Environmental temperature and humidity both contribute to dehydration and heat illnesses.
- ◆ Clothing, such as dark, bulky, or rubber protective equipment can drastically increase the chance of heat illness and dehydration.
- ◆ Wet bulb temperature measurements should be taken 10-15 minutes before practice, and the results should be used with a heat index to determine if practices or contests should be started, modified or stopped.
- ◆ Even dry climates can have high humidity if sprinkler systems are scheduled to run before early morning practices start. This collection of water does not evaporate until environmental temperatures increase and dew points lower. Dry climate areas should take wet bulb and temperature readings 10 to 15 minutes before practice or contests.
- ◆ A Heat Index chart should be followed to determine if practice/contests should be held.
- ◆ A Heat Index chart should come from a reputable source like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association.
- ◆ A relative humidity of 35 percent and a temperature of 95 degrees Fahrenheit are likely to cause heat illness, with heat stroke likely.
- ◆ A relative humidity of 70 percent and a temperature of 95 degrees Fahrenheit are very likely to cause heat illness, with heat stroke very likely.



