Sun/Heat Exposure

Physical activity on hot summer days combined with overexposure to heat and ultraviolet radiation can greatly affect one’s health if safeguards are not in place.

Heat exposure may lead to muscle cramps (physical labor in a hot environment), exhaustion (excessive loss of water and salt), and/or stroke (the body is unable to control its temperature resulting in permanent disability or death). Ultraviolet (UV) radiation is a component of sunlight that can cause premature aging of the skin, wrinkles, cataracts, and even skin cancer.

Be especially careful in the sun if you burn easily, spend a lot of time outdoors, or have fair skin or blond, red, or light brown hair. NOTE: It is important to notify your supervisor if you are particularly sensitive to heat or have heat-related problems.

Observe the following precautions:

- **Limit exposure.** UV rays are most intense between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- **Cover up.** Wear tightly woven clothing that you can’t see through.
- **Use sunscreen.** A sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 blocks 93 percent of UV rays.
- **Wear a hat.** A wide brim hat works best because it protects the neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp.
- **Wear UV-absorbent shades.** Sunglasses don’t have to be expensive, but they should block 99 to 100 percent of UVA and UVB radiation.

The combination of heat and humidity can be a health threat during the summer months, so take these additional precautions:

- **Drink plenty of water.** Don’t wait until you get thirsty.
- **Wear light clothing.** Clothes that are breathable and loose-fitting are desirable. Cotton is a good example.
- **Take frequent breaks.** Short breaks in the cool shade allows the body to recover more quickly from heat stress.
- **Eat smaller meals.** Digesting a large meal in hot weather can promote lethargy and potentially put you at risk while on the job.
- **Avoid substances that dehydrate.** Consuming caffeine, alcohol, or large amounts of sugar can lead to dehydration.
- **Be mindful of medication side effects.** Ask your health care provider or pharmacist if there are any adverse effects to being in the sun/heat while on prescription medication.

Additionally, be careful when using personal protective equipment (e.g. air purifying respirators, heavy work suits, etc.) since it can increase your susceptibility to heat stress.

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