

Jersey Summer Shore Safety: Heat Stress & Dehydration

Fact Sheet FS1141



Cooperative Extension

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Physical activity combined with healthy eating habits leads to a healthier lifestyle. New Jersey's shoreline, waterways, and hiking/biking trails provide excellent opportunities for residents and visitors to maintain a healthy level of physical activity. Protecting your family with proper hydration while working, playing, or exercising outdoors is important for the health of your skin and body.

Since most of our body is made of water, we must be sure to provide ample fluids for proper body function. During hot days our body sweats as a natural cooling process. In high humidity, sweat will not evaporate quickly enough and your body will not cool down as efficiently. Drinking six to eight glasses (eight ounce glasses) of water per day can help keep your body hydrated and reduce heat stress. Conditions such as age, obesity, fever, dehydration, heart disease, mental illness, poor circulation, excessive sunburn, and prescription drug and alcohol use can all increase heat stress on the body (Centers for Disease Control, 2010). Do not wait until you are thirsty to drink water. In a heavy exercise or hot environment you should drink cool fluids each hour. Please note that if your doctor limits the amount of fluids you drink or you are taking water pills, it is important to seek your doctor's advice about your fluid intake.

Some medications increase your sensitivity to the sun. Be sure to check with your doctor about the medications you are taking and exposure to the sun or heat. To reduce the heat stress on your body drink cool nonalcoholic beverages and increase your fluid intake, regardless of your activity level (Centers for Disease Control, 2010).

Elderly people (those 65 years and older) infants, young children, and people with chronic medical conditions are more sensitive to excessive heat and heat stress. Spending time in air conditioned areas can protect you from heat-related illness and death. Spend time in public libraries, shopping malls or heat-relief shelters in your area.

Be sensible about the amount of time you spend in the sun. Avoid overexposure that will result in sunburned skin. Reapply sunscreen after water sports or heavy perspiration. Be mindful that wiping perspiration is also wiping away sunscreen. If you become sunburned, calm skin irritation and heat by taking cool baths then applying a moisturizing skin cream that contains aloe. Sun burn needs to be treated like any other burn – use cool running water for 20 minutes over the burnt area.

Avoid outdoor activities during the heat of the day. Plan events for early morning or late in the afternoon. Seek shady areas to keep cool on hot days. Take an umbrella with you to the beach or sporting event to minimize exposure to the heat and prevent sun damage to your skin. Although overcast conditions do not feel as hot, heat stress is still possible, especially in humid weather. It is also a good idea to avoid hot foods and heavy meals that can add stress your body. If you feel lightheaded, confused, and weak or faint, you should seek a cool place immediately. When experiencing symptoms, it is wise to lower your body temperature quickly by taking a cool shower.

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Protect your body from the heat and sun by wearing light, loose fitting clothing with long sleeves. Long pants can be worn to protect your legs. A wide-brimmed hat will help reduce the sun and heat on your face, neck and head. Protect your feet by wearing sandals or shoes that cover the tops of your feet and protect the soles of your feet from hot surfaces such as concrete, roads/paving, and beach sand.

Set a good example for your children by practicing safe sun and heat exposure, and drinking plenty of water to keep the body hydrated. Teach your children to wear sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher, and limit exposure to the sun and heat. Children and adults should also avoid drinking large amounts of sugar because it can cause additional fluid loss. It is also good to avoid very cold drinks because they can cause painful stomach cramps (Centers for Disease Control, 2010). Never leave children or pets in a parked car on hot days. Even if the window is cracked open, the temperature in the car can become dangerously hot and cause heat-related illnesses and possibly death.

Staying well hydrated and healthy in the sun will help ensure an enjoyable outdoor experience for you and your family. For more information on Summer Safety at the Jersey Shore, please visit <http://ocean.njaes.rutgers.edu> or download other Jersey Summer Shore Safety fact sheets.

References

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(2009) Centers for Disease Control, Extreme Heat: A Personal Prevention Guide to Promote Your Health & Safety; www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide.asp.

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December 2010

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