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BEAT THE HEAT: AMAA WARNS ABOUT DANGERS OF HEAT ILLNESS
Children, Elderly, Outdoor Workers and Active Adults Most at Risk

CHICAGO – June 15, 2002 – The headlines blaze with the news: on average 318 Americans die each year from heat-related illness¹.

As hot summer weather approaches, the American Medical Athletic Association (AMAA) warns of the increased risk for dehydration and heat illness, especially for children, the elderly, outdoor workers and active adults and encourages people to remember this headline: Heat Illness is Preventable.

“With the abundance of heat-related illness cases we have seen over the past year, it is important to educate at-risk populations about the serious implications of dehydration,” said Noel D. Nequin, MD, president of AMAA. “Heat-related illnesses – from dehydration to life-threatening heat stroke – are entirely preventable and the first step in prevention is to drink plenty of fluids.”

AT-RISK POPULATIONS

Research shows that most people don’t drink enough to stay properly hydrated, especially when drinking plain water.

Children are at particularly high risk because children generate more body heat and absorb more heat from the environment than adults, causing body temperature to rise more quickly when they become dehydrated and are exposed to high temperatures and humidity.

“Children produce more heat during activity and have a lower sweating capacity compared to adults. This can limit their ability to cool themselves,” said Kenneth Cooper, MD, MPH, founder, The Cooper Clinic, Dallas. “To make matters worse, most children don’t drink fluids until they are thirsty – which means they are already dehydrated, placing them at even greater risk for heat illness.”

Because there are subtle age-related differences in body fluid balance during exercise in the heat, elderly adults must practice a gradual acclimatization to heat, emphasizing hydration.

¹ Based on heat-related deaths from 1979 – 1996, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Also at risk are people who work outdoors, such as landscapers, construction/road crews, traffic police, etc., because they spend much of their day in the heat with little chance for either fluids or bathroom breaks. As a result, they may drink less fluid throughout the day.

ACCLIMATION: BEING “USED TO THE HEAT” IS NOT WHAT YOU THINK

Most people who live in warm climates think they are safe from the dangers of heat illness and don't need to be cautious because their bodies are “used to” the heat.

Research shows, however, that people who are acclimated to the heat sweat more and lose more fluids so they are more susceptible to dehydration.

“People don't recognize that while being acclimated makes you more tolerant to the heat, it actually means you have to drink more fluids because you sweat sooner and faster than people who are not acclimated,” said Catherine Fieseler, M.D., The Cleveland Clinic.

AMAA RECOMMENDATIONS

Heat illness is one of the most preventable injuries.

The AMAA recommends drinking before you get thirsty because thirst is a poor indicator of dehydration. Drinking at regular intervals also helps maintain fluid balance in the body.

“To keep our patients healthy, we highlight the importance of hydration before, during and after activity,” said Dr. Nequin. “Research show sports drinks -- like Gatorade -- that are lightly flavored with a small amount of sodium encourage people to drink up to 90 percent more than plain water and provide one of the best choices to help you stay properly hydrated.”

The AMAA recommends people who are active in hot weather:

- Drink before you're thirsty, when thirst kicks in you're already slightly dehydrated
- Wear light-colored and loose-fitting clothing
- Take periodic breaks from the direct rays of the sun
- During activity avoid drinking caffeinated beverages and alcohol because those fluids stimulate urine production and can promote dehydration.
- During activity avoid drinking fruit juices or soft drinks because those beverages are high in sugar, which slows fluid absorption by the body.
- Remember to bring fluids with you to activities because they may not be readily available.

The AMAA also recommends that everyone knows and acknowledges the warning signs of dehydration:

- Dry lips and tongue
- Weakness, dizziness or exhaustion
- Nausea
- Headache
- Concentrated or dark colored urine
- Muscle cramping

Seek immediate medical attention if someone becomes disoriented or unconscious while performing activity in the heat.

The American Medical Athletic Association, located in Bethesda, Md., was founded in 1969 by running doctors and sports medicine and nutrition professionals who are dedicated to expanding their knowledge in sports medicine and encouraging their patients to be active.

For more information about hot weather exercise visit, www.amaasportsmed.org.