

Many jobs require work in hot environments, both outdoors and indoors. Working in the heat and doing heavy physical work can affect the body's cooling system. If the body gains heat faster than it is able to cool itself, body temperature rises and heat stress occurs. When working in hot conditions, be adequately prepared to deal with heat stress. It's an employer's responsibility to make sure that workers are trained properly in how to prevent heat stress. Workers should be able to recognize the same early symptoms of heat stress in fellow workers.

Signs and Symptoms of Heat Stress

- Onset of a headache or nausea
- Decreased efficiency, co-ordination, and alertness
- Increased irritability
- Light-headedness or dizziness
- Fainting
- Hands, feet, and ankles swelling, usually one to two days after first exposure

Health Problems Associated with Heat Stress

If heat stress is not recognized and treated in the early stages, more serious and even fatal conditions may quickly develop, such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

Prevention Practices

Some things you can do to prevent heat stress include the following:

- Learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of heat stress in yourself and co-workers. Avoid working alone.
- Acclimatize your body (gradually expose yourself to heat at work).
- Drink plenty of water (one glass every 20 minutes). Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Wear light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing made of breathable fabric (such as cotton).

It is the employer's responsibility to ensure that workers are properly trained in how to prevent heat stress. Some of the things an employer can do to help prevent heat stress are to encourage workers to:

- Take rest breaks in a cool or well-ventilated area. Take more breaks during the hottest part of the day or when doing hard physical work. Allow the body to cool down before beginning again.
- Schedule work to minimize heat exposure. Do the hardest physical work during the coolest part of the day.

Remember: If there is any doubt about you or your co-worker's condition, get medical advice.

For more information

- WCB pamphlet *Preventing Heat Stress at Work*:
http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/health_and_safety_information/by_topic/assets/pdf/heat_stress.pdf
- WCB regulations and guidelines related to heat stress:
<http://regulation.healthandsafetycentre.org/s/Part7.asp>
<http://regulation.healthandsafetycentre.org/s/GuidelinePart7.asp>