



Heat Health: Tips from a doctor on how to stay cool

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INstride



Dr. Stephen Ritter of Methodist Sports Medicine/ The Orthopedic Specialists in Indianapolis

Sultry summer days don't have to sideline you from outdoor fun—or yardwork.

INstride wants to keep fitness fanatics and gardening gurus alike safe but active. We checked in with Dr. Stephen Ritter of Methodist Sports Medicine/ The Orthopedic Specialists in Indianapolis for ways to do just that.

Summer sports—reduce your risk of dehydration

“Every year, emergency departments are filled with athletes who have not prepared or paid attention to staying hydrated, causing them to suffer from heat-related illnesses,” Ritter said in a tip sheet.

Be prepared: Check the weather for an idea of expected temperatures and the intensity of the heat. Perform strenuous exercises during the early morning and late afternoon to help avoid the hottest times of day. Additionally, proper attire, such as wearing light-colored clothes that reflect the light and transfer the moisture away from your body can help keep your skin cool and decrease the absorption of UV rays.

Pre-sport drink: Being properly hydrated before your summer sporting event is just as important as staying hydrated during it. Drink 8-12 cups of water daily. If your body's “tank” is full going in, you will be much more heat-tolerant. If you become dehydrated, it is almost impossible to replenish the deficit from ongoing fluid loss during a game or activity. Experiment with various types of drinks ranging from water to sports drinks to determine what works best to quench your thirst.

Signs of heat-related illness: A mild form of heat-related illness is known as heat exhaustion. Signs include heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, headache, fainting, nausea or vomiting. Your skin may be cool or moist to the touch and your pulse rate will be fast and weak. If not treated properly, you can suffer from a heat stroke, a sign of hyperthermia where you have an abnormally elevated blood temperature. Symptoms can mimic those of a heart attack. You may not emit sweat, but may suffer from a red or flushed face, hallucinations, changes in behavior, confusion or even a seizure.

Treatment: Moving, even having someone move you, to a cool and shaded place quickly is the most important thing to do when addressing a heat-related illness. Make sure that any tight clothing is loosened and remove any extra layers. Drink about half a glass of fluid, such as water or a sports drink, every 15 to 20 minutes. Do not drink any alcohol or caffeine, as it will further dehydrate your body. To help get your body temperature back down, sponge off with a cool, wet cloth. Follow these guidelines and you will most likely begin feeling better in about 30 minutes. If symptoms persist or worsen, call for emergency medical assistance.

Care for your lawn — and yourself

“Yard work can be considered another great form of exercise. But, with any physical activity, it’s important to warm up and stretch your muscles. Just as you are susceptible to back injuries when lifting weights, you also can be prone to back sprains when weeding your garden, mowing your lawn or raking leaves.”

Warm up before yard work: Take some time to walk around outside to prepare for any moving, lifting, digging or bending in the garden. Stretch your back muscles by dropping down to carefully touch your toes. For a seated back stretch, lean forward from your hips and reach for the floor and hold. A five- to 10-minute warm-up for your back muscles will help prevent any strains or soreness later.

Lift heavy loads properly: The most common mistake people make when working in the yard is lifting heavy objects inappropriately. Bend your knees and use your legs to lift your body up. Instead of reaching forward to move a heavy object, walk over to the object and lift it straight up off the ground by bending your knees and keeping your spine in an upright position. This will help avoid placing strain on your spine and back muscles.

Avoid constant bending: Kneeling is always better for your back than bending over for long periods of time. By kneeling in the garden, you are putting much less strain on your back and spine. If necessary, use knee pads to protect your knees from dirt or soreness. If you are weeding your garden, try sitting on a bucket to keep your body at an angle that supports your back. If you are going to shovel, make sure the shovel is placed directly in front of you and parallel to your hip bones. Also, using long-handled tools will help you maintain a proper posture.

Don’t overdo it: Gardening can cause back pain and overuse injuries. Another way to avoid straining your muscles is to rotate your tasks to avoid repetitive movements. For example, after 15 minutes of raking, change to pruning or mowing your lawn. You should also avoid all-day marathon gardening sessions. Space out your gardening tasks over the course of several days.