



Keep the Summer Heat from Turning Deadly

Watching a thermometer blow its top may be funny in a cartoon, but for many Georgians, that mercury-boiling heat is all too real, and it can be dangerous.

Adjusting to extreme temperatures takes time. Those who work in air-conditioned offices or homes all week may be hit hard by summer heat. The body needs to adapt to levels of work and heat. As it does, it improves the stability of the circulatory system and the balance of salt in the body.

To adjust, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension specialists say schedule your most active times outdoors in the early morning or very late, just before dark. Noon is often considered the hottest time, but it's usually hottest in mid to late afternoon.

Intense heat leads to hyperthermia, with a range of symptoms including dizziness, rapid heartbeat, diarrhea, nausea, cramps, headache, intense weakness, breathing difficulty and mental changes. Another sign is an inability to sweat, which leads to a vicious cycle of worsening symptoms.

A person who is accustomed to the heat has better control of his or her body temperature and heart rate and is able to sweat more.

True Southerners are better prepared to handle intense heat because most housing has air conditioning or at least fans for cooling. But many people are still at risk.

The best way to get adjusted is to take the heat in small doses. When the temperature climbs to 95 degrees, UGA experts offer the following tips for preventing heat-related illnesses:

- Restrict gardening to 40 minutes with a break of 20 minutes.
- Drink enough water to replace body fluid lost through sweating. Water or fruit juices replace fluids quickly.
- Take breaks in a shaded or air-conditioned place whenever possible.
- Check the temperature and humidity hourly.
- Design work so one task can be done in the sun and the next in the shade.
- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothes.
- Check the label on your medications for sun exposure information. Many drugs, including cold and allergy medications containing antihistamines, increase the risk of heat illness.

UGA specialists say you can't trust your senses when it comes to your body's need for water.