



6 Ways to Prevent Heat Stress at Work

You can treat heat stress, but preventing it is even better. Here are the steps you need to know to do both.

For employees working out of doors or in older manufacturing facilities with no air conditioning, heat-related problems begin to surface in May and June and as the heat continues into July, August, and September, traditionally the hottest months of the year.

Heat problems kill some 4,000 Americans yearly, including the very young and old, those with diseases such as diabetes that disrupt the body's temperature control mechanism, and for those who are working in the heat. That includes employees working year round in desert like climates even though it is “dry” heat.

Heat problems themselves come in three varieties: heat cramps, heat exhaustion (also called heat prostration or collapse,) and the real killer, heatstroke. Collectively, these conditions are known as *heat stress*.

OSHA regulates and demands that employers protect employees from heat stress exposures.

1. Heat cramps:

Get out of the hot environment, stop using your large muscles, drink water, and replace electrolytes

2. Heat Exhaustion:

Get out of the heat and take off any clothing that does not have a wicking factor or is located around the head and neck.

Drink a liter of water (slowly), lie down with your feet up, and use a fan for cooling, or get the person into a cooled environment.

The problem should go away in 30 minutes but if it persists, get medical attention.

3. Heatstroke:

A medical emergency. Call 911 or medical personnel on site ASAP

Lower the body core temperature and that might include:

- **cold packs on the neck, armpits, and groin**
- **wet sheets or towels placed on person**
- **cold, air-conditioned room.**

Prevention is the key. It is much easier to prevent these events than have treat them.

1. **Pre-hydrate.** Provide water on site and readily accessible. Before activity starts, have employees drink up to 16 ounces of fluid. Then drink 8 ounces every 20 minutes during the activity. Take more frequent breaks out of the sun
2. **Drink flavored water.** Plain water quenches thirst too quickly, so workers tend to not drink enough of it. Add some flavored low salt water to the offering all kept on ice. Take more frequent breaks out of the sun
3. **Acclimate to the heat slowly,** over 5 to 7 days of exposure. For new workers, institute a 20 % increase of time in the heat for each day. Workers already used to these conditions can increase exposure

slightly faster, but 4 days out of the heat means re-acclimation will be needed so train on these facts. Take more frequent breaks out of the sun

4. **Don't wear a hat.** It restricts heat loss through the head. Workers operating in direct sunlight can wear a visor. But remember SAFETY FIRST and a hard hat does not follow into this category. If a hard hat is required, employees must wear it and keep cool as possible. Take more frequent breaks out of the sun
5. **Wear loose, thin synthetic fabrics.** They help the skin stay cool through evaporation. Avoid cotton as it soaks up sweat, keeps the evaporation factor down. Look for wicking fabrics such as washable silks. Take more frequent breaks out of the sun
6. **Wear your PPE no matter what the temperature.** It can't protect you if it's not on you. If it's uncomfortable, Take more frequent breaks out of the sun