



Preventing Heat Stress-Tool Box Talk 4

Wow! What a scorcher! You knew it was going to be a hot day but with this humidity it has to be 105° F outside. You reach for that power tool to finish your job and start to feel lightheaded. It's probably because you haven't eaten much this morning. You can make it until lunch!

Time passes and your condition hasn't gotten any better-in fact it's worse! Your breathing has increased, you're sweating profusely, and your mouth is dry. Something's wrong! You start to climb down the scaffolding but you're almost too weak to move. You feel like you're going to be sick. With no control over your movements, you fall to the ground below. The workers above you are trying to get your attention but you can't understand them. You yell, "Help me up guys!" but they don't respond. Can't they hear? All you can see is black...what's happening...?

Heat Exhaustion! That is what's happening. Heat exhaustion can occur when you are subjected to hot environments and fail to take in enough fluids, salts, or both. And even worse, this can lead to a life threatening condition known as a heat stroke. Sun stroke or heat stroke happens when the body's internal mechanism fails to regulate its core temperature. At this point, the body stops cooling itself through perspiration and can't get rid of excess heat. Unfortunately, the end result can be death if the body temperature isn't lowered immediately! So, especially if you work in hot environments, it's critical to recognize when you're suffering from a Heat Stress Disorder.

SYMPTOMS OF HEAT STRESS DISORDERS:

- **Heat Cramps** - Symptoms are painful spasms of the muscles. Heat cramps are caused when workers consume large quantities of water but fail to take in enough salt to replace the salt their body lost through sweating. Tired muscles are most susceptible to cramping.
- **Heat Exhaustion** - Symptoms for this disorder are moist, clammy, pale skin; profuse sweating; extreme weakness or fatigue; dry mouth; dizziness; fast pulse; rapid breathing; muscle cramps and nausea.
- **Heat/Sun Stroke** - Symptoms are a very high body temperature (104° F or higher); lack of sweat; mental confusion, delirium, or hallucinations; deep breathing and rapid pulse; hot, dry, red or mottled skin; and dilated pupils. Seek medical help at once for this condition.

TIPS FOR PREVENTION:

- **Acclimatization** - Adjust yourself to the heat through short exposure periods followed by longer exposure until your body is accustomed to the heat. It may take 5-7 days of hot weather exposure before the body undergoes changes that make heat more bearable.
- **Drink lots of Water/Liquids** - Replenish the fluid that your body is losing through sweating. Not only water, but critical electrolytes such as sodium, potassium and calcium are lost through sweating, so consider using electrolyte drinks to combat heat related disorders.
- **Education** - Know the signs and symptoms of heat stress disorders and *act quickly*.
- **Use Your Head** - *Do not* ignore possible symptoms of heat stress disorders. If you feel very hot, dizzy, nauseous or if your muscles cramp, stop and cool off!

Heat Stress Disorders are serious. Workers who have ignored the symptoms have lost their lives. Humans have an ingenious system for regulating body temperature-a personal, "natural" air conditioner. We sweat, it evaporates through our skin, and we're cooled off. But this personal air conditioner can fail, and often does if we overexert when environmental temperatures are high.

Be Cool. Know what you have to do to Beat the Heat!