

# Dehydration, heat exhaustion not to be taken lightly

By Beth Brown

It's important for people to understand the difference between heat exhaustion and dehydration, especially if you are exercising in high temperatures and even high altitudes, such as Lake Tahoe and our surrounding areas.

Heat exhaustion is a condition, where symptoms may include heavy sweating and a rapid pulse, a result of your body overheating. It's one of three heat-related syndromes, with heat cramps being the mildest and heatstroke being the most severe.



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Heat exhaustion is preventable. Causes of heat exhaustion include exposure to high temperatures, particularly when combined with high humidity and strenuous physical activity. Signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion may develop suddenly, or over time, especially with prolonged periods of exercise.

## **Possible heat exhaustion symptoms include:**

- Cool, moist skin with goose bumps when in the heat
- Heavy sweating
- Feeling faint or dizzy

- Fatigue
- Weak rapid pulse
- Muscle cramps
- Nausea
- Headache

Without immediate treatment, heat exhaustion can lead to heatstroke, a life-threatening condition. Some things you can do when you start to feel heat exhaustion symptoms: stop activity and rest (in a comfortable and cool spot, like under a shady tree); slowly drink cool water and/or sports drinks with electrolytes. Seek help immediately if you think you are experiencing heat exhaustion.



Staying cool on a hot hike is important. Photo/LTN file

**Dehydration** occurs when you lose more fluid than you take in, and your body doesn't have enough water and other fluids to carry out its normal functions. Anyone may become dehydrated, but young children, older adults and people with chronic illnesses are most at risk. If you don't replace lost fluids, you may get dehydrated. Common causes of dehydration include intense diarrhea, vomiting, fever or excessive sweating. Not drinking enough water during hot weather or exercise also may cause dehydration. You can usually reverse mild to moderate dehydration by drinking more fluids, but severe dehydration

needs immediate medical treatment.

**The safest approach is prevention.** Monitor your fluid loss during hot weather, illness or exercise, and drink enough liquids to replace what you lose. Mild to moderate dehydration is likely to cause: dry sticky mouth, feeling tired or sleepy, fatigue, feeling thirsty, not urinating, unable to make tears, dry skin, headache, constipation, dizzy or lightheaded feeling.

**Severe dehydration, a medical emergency, can cause:** Extreme thirst, irritability, lack of sweating, no urination, shriveled and dry skin, rapid heart rate and rapid breathing, hot skin, confusion. Unfortunately, thirst isn't always a reliable gauge of the body's need for water, especially in children and older adults. A better indicator is the color of your urine: Clear or light-colored urine means you're well hydrated, whereas a dark yellow or amber color usually signals dehydration.

**When to see a doctor.** If you're a healthy adult, you can usually treat mild to moderate dehydration by drinking more fluids, such as water or a sports drink (Gatorade, Powerade, others). Get immediate medical care if you develop severe signs and symptoms such as extreme thirst, a lack of urination, shriveled skin, dizziness and confusion. (Mayo Clinic, 2013)

Barton wants you to have a safe and happy summer and the best prevention is education. So, whether you're running, hiking, cycling or even boating be sure to keep the above warning signs in mind.

If you feel as though you or a loved one are experiencing any of these symptoms, be sure to call 911 or visit Barton Memorial Hospital's emergency department, located at 2170 South Ave., South Lake Tahoe. Questions, call (530) 541.320.

Reference: *Mayo Clinic, July 2, 2013, Heat Exhaustion.*

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