

TOCA Tips: Preventing Heat Illness

Heat illness in athletes is prevalent in Arizona. Heat illness can be life threatening if the warning signs and symptoms are not recognized. Major types of heat illness include Heat cramps, Heat exhaustion, and Heat stroke.

Heat cramps usually occur after strenuous exercise and is accompanied with dehydration. Patients present with severe pain and cramps in the legs and abdomen. Heat exhaustion occurs with prolonged heat exposure. Systemic symptoms include headaches, weakness, nausea, pale skin, and cognitive deficits such as disorientation and dizziness. Heat stroke is characterized by a rapid increase in the body's core temperature. It is a medical emergency and can present suddenly. Common symptoms include confusion, possible loss of consciousness, lack of sweating, and tachycardia.

The key to preventing heat illness is prevention. Avoid exercise in the middle of the day. Maintain hydration with frequent water or sports drink breaks (15-20 oz per hour minimum). Do not exercise after drinking alcohol or significant caffeine. Wear loose clothes that keep the body cool and wear a hat to prevent heat loss from your head. Use sunscreen to prevent sunburn, which decreases sweating (cooling) rates. If you can't seem to cool down, find shade and rest immediately. If your body temperature increases, or you have any cognition changes, use icepacks on your core and neck and seek medical treatment immediately.