

Outdoor health tips from the Posse:

It starts with a healthy heart

Old Mother Nature has no mercy when she decides it is time to do you in. If you are recreating outdoors, you will soon realize that the woods is not the place to find out about the rudiments of Murphy's Law.

Many of the things that can do you in are purely accidental and some of it is just plain bad luck. Taking unnecessary chances causes other accidents. Shortcuts off the trail come to mind as an unnecessary chance.

Falls stand out in first place as the number 1 killer of people outdoors. This includes falling off cliffs, waterfalls and sliding down steep slopes. Avalanches and drowning are in the 2nd and 3rd place on the list. These you cannot always prevent, as accidents will happen when you are in the wrong place at the wrong time.


Many will be surprised to hear that number 4 on the list would be heart attacks. I can't tell you how many times we have searched for a "lost person" only to discover that they had suffered a heart attack and went on to paradise a bit ahead of schedule.

Heart attacks are the leading cause of death in the United States as more than 1.5 million Americans suffer one each year. Over half a million people die annually in the United States from them.

About a quarter million people are visiting the emergency room annually because of an outdoors related injury. Your chances of dying while hiking in the mountains is 1 in 15,700 annually or a .0064% chance. Not really all that bad unless you are that unlucky guy.

Before you succumb to the clutching grip of thanatophobia (the fear of death) realize that those percentages are really low. Remember to never head off into the woods looking for trouble, lest you find it.

We bring much of our problems on because of poor planning, lack of preparation and just plain bad practices. Take for example the vacationer who is overweight, out of shape, and basically running on nerves. He visits Colorado on vacation and immediately heads for the high country.



Mark Rackay
Tips from the Posse



Recreating in the outdoors requires a healthy heart and regular exercise is one of the crucial requirements. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/Mark Rackay)

His altitude back home is somewhere around sea level, and allowing no time for acclimation, he heads up to 10,000 feet for a hike. Murphy and Mother Nature are up there waiting for him with an aromatic pine box.

It may surprise you to know that the biggest predictor of a heart attack is not the altitude at which it occurred, but rather the age and sex of the individual and whether they'd taken time to acclimate. Studies show there is no increase in risk in men who participated regularly in mountain sports, regardless of age. Moral is, take time to acclimate.

When it comes to heart attacks in the great outdoors there is much you can do to prevent them. Take the time and get into the best physical shape you can. While exercise is important, so is plenty of rest. Watch your diet and eat lots of fresh vegetables and lower the fat intake.

Here are a few things all of us can do to help lower our risk of a heart attack:

- *See your doctor and get checked out on a regular basis. Heart attacks affect men pushing 50 more than anyone else.

If you have not been very active lately, get checked out sooner than later, and definitely before you begin any exercise routine.

- *Examine your exercise routine. I know, we all get sick of hearing this but it means everything. Good, high exertion cardio exercise, 30 minutes a day and a minimum of 3 times a week is what it takes. Throw in some strength training to build some muscles as well. If you are planning a pack trip or a big game hunt, start working out at least 3 months prior to the trip.
- *Take time to acclimate to the altitude. Drink plenty of water and get plenty of rest. If you are coming from out of town, stop for a day or two in Montrose before heading up any further in the mountains. When you get to the high altitude, take your time. Spend a day in camp before hitting the trails.
- *Watch your pace while on the hike. Don't push yourself past your limits. If you cannot maintain a normal conversation because of your breathing, you are going to fast.
- *Be aware that some people just

have an unhealthy heart, no matter how much they eat right or exercise. If you are one of those folks, follow the instructions of your Doctor, and enjoy the mountains on the playing field he sets for you.

You spend lots of time planning your trip and getting your gear ready. The vehicle is service and the tires are aired up. Be a better friend to yourself and make sure your heart is up to the task. If you want to take chances, try a pick six in the lottery or hit the blackjack tables in Vegas, but play it safe when it comes to your heart. ●

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@bresnan.net.



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