

Don't get beat by the heat



Tips
from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

During my years of exile in the Florida Keys, I received an education in heat and heat related illnesses. I learned most of it using my favorite method; the hard way.

In the summer months, also known as hurricane season, the Keys are an incredibly hot place. Overnight lows may dip to 80 degrees, while daytime highs often reach upper 90s. Throw in that humidity that is so thick in the air that fish swim in it.

Most of my time was spent on the water that reflects that sun right back up at your body. Add to that the salt air that carries its own breed of denseness and heat related illnesses become commonplace.

I seem to be the reverse of most people. At first, the heat did not bother me. As a matter of fact, I rather enjoyed it. As old age began sneaking up on me in the rearview mirror, my body reacted poorly to heat. Thus, I returned home to my place in Colorado.

Some people leave Colorado for a few months during the winter seeking warmer temperatures. Around here, they usually head to Arizona. You will never see me doing that. Seems akin to someone throwing a left hook at you, and you lean into it.

Colorado is a place where heat-related illnesses could be a real problem. When nighttime lows often dip into the 50s and daytime highs reach the upper 90s, coupled with humidity so low that perspiration evaporates from the skin undetected, the outdoor person better watch their step.

During the summer months we often see a flow of monsoonal moisture that increases our humidity a great deal. This happens to be the same time of year we, as outdoor-loving folks, are the most active outdoors. This would include all our activities that are physical in nature, like hiking, backpacking, kayaking, exercising and many others.

Whenever you are physically active in hot weather, you put extra stress on your body, and run the risk of serious illness. As the air



My dog Leyla has the right idea about how to not get heat problems while enjoying outdoor activities. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

temperature and humidity rise when you exercise, your body's core temperature can soar.

Watch for the signs as they come on slowly. Unless you are paying attention to them you might not notice. Your blood thickens as its volume is reduced. Your pulse quickens as your heart works harder. Exhaustion begins to settle in and your mind may start to become confused and you may start to make some bad decisions.

You can eventually lose your will to survive, which usually ends poorly. If you do not drink some H2O quickly the risk of heat exhaustion becomes a real possibility. Heat exhaustion occurs when the body's temperature gets too high. You may feel nausea, fatigue, profuse sweating and clammy skin. The treatment is simple; lie down in the shade with your feet elevated and pour down the fluids.

If you fail to recognize the symptoms of a heat related illness coming on, hold tight, because the next phase is even worse. When the body temperature nears 105 you need immediate medical treatment for heat stroke, which can be deadly. At this point, the victim might have hot, dry skin, headache, dizziness and unconsciousness. Notice that sweating has probably stopped.

This constitutes a medical emergency. If outdoors in a remote area, a medical evacuation should be immediately planned. In the meantime, elevate the victim's head. This is opposite of the treatment for heat exhaustion where you elevate their feet.

Place cool wet clothing or towels around the

victim's body and fan them to keep air moving and help lower their body temperature. Monitor their temperature, and as it begins to drop below 104 degrees, replace the wet towels with dry ones.

Someone in this state must be monitored for signs of shock, and you should be ready to resuscitate them at any moment. It is that serious. Get this person to a hospital as quickly as possible as heat stroke can damage the kidneys, brain and heart, all assuming the person lives.

Sometimes your activity goes on for long hours of a day, or even into several days, such as an extended backpack trip. During this strenuous activity, if you are consuming only water, your normal level of sodium can drop to a dangerously low level. When this happens, it is called hyponatremia, and it can kill you.

Anyone who has an existing heart or kidney problem is more susceptible to

this condition. The symptoms are similar to dehydration, starting with a headache, confusion and tiredness. If not addressed, symptoms can progress to muscle cramps, called "salt cramps" and spasms.

After this, if left untreated, you can lose consciousness with brain swelling, leading to coma and death. The solution is simple. You need to replace your salt and other electrolytes when sweating and overheating for extended periods of time.

If your activity will last more than an hour, you are going to need to bring some carbohydrates into your body. Most of the sport drinks such as Gatorade and PowerAde have a pretty good balance of carbohydrates and electrolytes. They do contain a fair amount of sugar but that can also help fuel your body.

You can make your own sports drinks quite easily at home if you are so inclined. Blend cold watermelon

juice, water, ice and a dash of salt. You can dilute just about any juice to a one-to-one ratio (one part water and one part juice) and it will get you to an average of seven percent carbohydrate blend, which is perfect for your activities.

The high summer heat can kill your pets that recreate with you with the same conditions that can kill us. If your dog's body temperature exceeds 104 degrees, it could die. With their fur coats, dogs cannot cool down in front of a fan the way humans do.

Dogs cool down by panting, which becomes less and less effective as the temperatures and humidity rises. Panting evaporates moisture from the mouth and lungs. This evaporation normally cools their body, but if the humidity is high, evaporation cannot take place and their body will overheat very quickly.

Keep your dog in the coolest place available when they are outdoors with you during hot times.

Try and keep their activity at a minimum and give them plenty of cool water to drink. Remember, if you are hot, they are probably overheated.

When the winter months are in full force here, I like to set the thermostat at 60 degrees. That seems to be a nice temperature for me. My wife complains the house is too cold and is always bumping the temperature up. I suggested she might consider spending her winters in Arizona. The idea did not go over well.

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@icloud.com.



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