

# Avoiding The Heat

**Wade Meyer, DPT**  
**Doctor of Physical Therapy**  
**St. Francis Physical Therapy**

Extreme heat and high humidity have been the cause of great concern over the past several weeks. The combination of these two items can be a major risk to anyone who is spending time outside. Therefore, precautions should be made in order to avoid potential heat related complications. The first item that should be stressed is the importance of water (at least 64 ounces per day). Water is the best way to keep the body hydrated and replenished since a large majority of the human body consists of water. People should not mistake drinking other beverages such as pop with replenishing the body in the same fashion as water. Since many of these items contain caffeine, which is considered a diuretic (aids in loss of body fluids), an individual is actually assisting in the process of water loss. Secondly, it is important to understand some of the potential signs and symptoms of heat related illness. The first signs of heat difficulties may come in the form of muscle cramping. If this occurs attempt to rest in a cool place, drink plenty of cool water, and complete passive stretching of the involved muscles. The next level of heat related illness is termed heat exhaustion and if this is not treated adequately it may quickly progress to the more severe heat stroke. Heat exhaustion may be identified by extreme sweating, headache, dizziness, cool, clammy skin, grayish skin, and uncoordinated behavior. Treatment during this stage includes resting in a cool place, possibly towel drying individual with cool water or using a fan and continuing to give liquids if possible. Heat stroke is the most severe form of heat illness and requires immediate medical attention. At this stage, the individual will no longer be sweating, disorientation is increased, possible unconsciousness, shallow breathing and reddish skin is apparent. If an individual has progressed to this point and you are waiting for medical attention attempt to place the individual in a cool environment with placement of cool towels in the area of the groin, armpits, and neck.

Extreme heat cannot always be avoided, however safety precautions can be undertaken. Therefore, enjoy the rest of the summer and if there are any questions relating to these issues, please contact St. Francis Physical Therapy (763) 753-8804.