

Rehab One, Ltd. Newsletter

BMH Sports Medicine Center

First Aid for Common Outdoor Emergencies

Whether you are spending the day watching track and field events or hiking in the woods for the weekend, there are some basic first aid procedures at which to be aware.

Hot weather can set the stage for heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke.

Heat cramps show up as muscle pain and spasms brought on by heavy physical activity. They result from the body's loss of water and salt through sweating. Heat exhaustion is the second stage, in which the loss of fluids in the body causes decreased blood flow to vital organs. This results in a form of shock.

Signs of heat exhaustion include cool, moist skin that is pale or red, profuse sweating, dilated pupils, weakness, dizziness, nausea and headache. If these signs and symptoms occur, the person should be taken out of the heat. The body temperature should then be lowered with cool wet towels or sheets, and feet should be elevated. Restrictive clothing should be loosened, and the person should be given cool water to drink, taking small sips ($\frac{1}{2}$ glass every 15 minutes). ABC's should be monitored. If heat exhaustion is not recognized and treated quickly, it can turn into heat stroke.

Heat stroke can be deadly. Signs of a heat stroke include very high body temperature; hot, dry, red skin; loss of consciousness; a fast, weak pulse; and quick, shallow breathing. EMS must be called quickly in this case and the person should be treated for shock. Again, the body should be cooled quickly and ABC's should be monitored, while giving small sips of cool water to drink.

Cold Temps

People exposed to cold temperatures can suffer from hypothermia and even frostbite. There are many predisposing factors that may increase the possibility of injury from cold weather. Some of these are being very old or very young, suffering from fractures or wounds, wearing wet clothing, extreme fatigue, stress and certain medications.

Signs of hypothermia include shivering, confusion, dizziness, numbness, weakness, drowsiness, impaired vision and impaired judgment. According to the American Red Cross, there are five stages, of hypothermia: shivering, apathy, loss of consciousness, decreasing pulse rate and breathing rate, and death.

First aid for hypothermic involves calling EMS, getting the person out of cold weather and wet clothing, and warming the body slowly. The hypothermic person should not be given anything to eat or drink until he is fully conscious. As in every case of shock, ABC's should be monitored.

Frostbite

Frost bite is also caused by exposure to cold weather. Early stage frostbite may be recognized by flushed skin. The skin may then turn white or grayish yellow and then blue. The person developing frostbite may have pain in the early stages, then become numb and cold.

The frostbite victim should be moved to a warm place. The frozen body part should then be placed in warm, but not hot, water (100-105°F). Frostbitten parts should not be rubbed or massaged. This could cause increased damage to the area. After warming in water, the area should be wrapped loosely in dry, sterile dressings. Medical attention should be sought to assess the degree of tissue damage. If blood supply is greatly compromised, gangrene may occur.

Insect and Snakebites

Insect bites and stings happen all the time, but some people have severe allergic reactions. This reaction usually happens within minutes after the bite or sting. Swelling and redness usually occur, and the person may develop hives, itching, rash, nausea, vomiting, dizziness and weakness. The victim may also have trouble breathing. These are all signs of anaphylactic shock.

If problems with breathing occur, EMS should be contacted immediately. The person should be placed in a position which eases breathing. Again ABC's should be monitored closely. Persons who know they are severely allergic may carry kits with them which can be used to slow or stop the allergic reaction.

A person bitten by a snake should also seek medical attention quickly. The wound should be washed and the body part kept very still. A bitten extremity should be splinted and kept lower than the heart. If EMS cannot reach the victim, the person should be carried or transported so that there is as little movement of the body as possible. If the person must walk, he should walk slowly. Snakebite kits may be used if the person cannot get medical attention within 30 minutes. Cold packs should not be used on snakebites.

The best weapon is prevention. If you know you are going to be exposed to the elements, take things that may be necessary in case of an emergency. This may be extra clothing or blankets, plenty of water, allergy or snakebite kits, and a first aid supply kit for outdoor emergencies. All of the topics discussed can be life threatening, but even more so if you are not prepared.

**For Further information call
(304) 369-5719**