

# Beat the heat, enjoy outdoor activities

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Correspondent

During the summer months, most people look forward to spending more time outside due to pleasant temperatures and sunshine. Sometimes, temperatures can rise to not-so-pleasant levels that can be hazardous. When this happens, the risk of heat-related illnesses increases.

According to Tech. Sgt. Robert Ramsey, 20th Aeromedical-Dental Squadron NCO in charge of Public Health, people should be aware of heat-related illnesses because although they are preventable, they can also be fatal. The three main heat-related illnesses associated with summer are heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. These problems come from the body's inability to rid itself of heat.

"The potential for problems is present when the environmental temperature is close to or exceeds normal body temperature," said Sgt. Ramsey.

## Heat cramps

According to the National Center for Environmental Health, heat cramps are muscle pains or spasms that may occur during or after strenuous activity. The cramps may develop in the muscles of the abdomen, arms or legs when the body has been depleted of salt and moisture after doing a lot of sweating. If a person believes they may be experiencing heat cramps, the NCEH suggests victims:

- Stop all activity, and sit quietly in a cool place.
- Drink clear juice or a sports drink.
- Stay away from any strenuous activities for a few hours after the cramps ease off. Returning to activity too quickly may cause further exertion and lead to heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

- Seek medical attention if the cramps don't subside in one hour.

## Heat exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is more serious than heat cramps, said Sgt. Ramsey. It can occur after being exposed to high temperatures without replacing the body's fluids lost from sweating. Symptoms of heat exhaustion are headache, heavy sweating, dizziness and loss of coordination, clammy and moist skin, weak and rapid pulse, tingling in the hands and feet and intense thirst.

"Thirst is an indication of dehydration, therefore it's important to drink water before and after engaging in any activities under hot or cold conditions because people can dehydrate in cold weather as well," said Sgt. Ramsey.

According to the NCEH, the elderly, those with high blood pressure and people working or exercising in a hot environment are more prone to experience heat exhaustion.

If a person is suffering the symptoms of heat exhaustion, they should be moved to a shady area or an air-conditioned building. Their feet should be elevated, and cool rags should be placed on several parts of their body. The victim should be given plenty of water and sports drinks to replenish electrolytes. Electrolytes are salts in the body that conduct electricity and are found in body fluids, tissue and blood. They are necessary to muscle coordination, heart and nerve function, fluid absorption and concentration.

"Water is ideal. However, what goes in does come out when sweating, and water, as well as electrolytes, is excreted," said Sgt. Ramsey. "The excretion of electrolytes may cause an imbalance, which may lead to lightheadedness and weakness. Drinking water and sports drinks during exposure to an activity in extreme heat will help prevent over excretion of essential body fluids."

If left untreated, heat exhaustion may progress into heat stroke.

## Heat stroke

The most severe heat-related illness is heat stroke and it is a medical emergency. It can cause death or permanent disability if treatment isn't provided. Unlike other heat-related illnesses, it does not have to be brought on by exercise or exertion.

"When heat stroke occurs, the body's internal mechanism is unable to regulate its core temperature," said Sgt. Ramsey. "Sweating stops and the body can no longer rid itself of excess heat."

Early symptoms of heat stroke are:

- A temperature of 103 degrees Fahrenheit or higher
- Mental confusion
- Difficulty breathing
- Any symptoms of heat exhaustion

According to Sgt. Ramsey, heat stroke victims will die if not treated promptly. Until medical help arrives, a heat stroke victim should be moved to a cool area and their temperature lowered immediately. Soak the victim's clothes with water and fan vigorously to increase cooling.

It is impossible to keep the environmental temperatures from rising but it is possible to prevent the physical impact it may have. Sgt. Ramsey said the four best ways to lower the risk of experiencing a heat-related illness are to move to a cooler location, remove or loosen clothing, rinse with cool water and reduce the work pace or load.

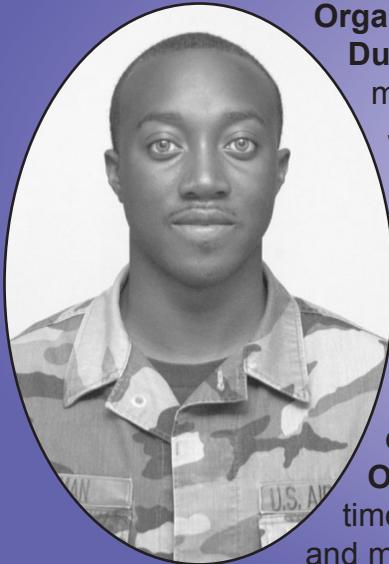
Heat-related illnesses can happen quickly and can be deadly if immediate action isn't taken. Pay attention to your reactions and the reactions of those around you when exposed to extreme temperatures. For more information, call Public Health at 895-6193 or log onto [www.mayoclinic.com/findinginformation/firstaidandselfcare](http://www.mayoclinic.com/findinginformation/firstaidandselfcare).



## Spirit Spotlight



### Senior Airman Chavez Pittman



**Organization:** 77th Fighter Squadron

**Duty title:** Life support journeyman

**Job duties:** Taking care of safety gear for the pilots and aircraft

**Hometown:** Atlanta

**Time in service:** Five years

**Family:** Wife, Staff Sgt. Tiffany Pittman, 20th Medical Operations Squadron, and daughter, Kiara

**Off-duty interests:** Spending time with my wife and daughter and motorcycle riding

**Words I live by:** "The sky is the limit."

### Senior Airman William Blackmon



**Organization:** 20th Medical Operations Squadron

**Duty title:** Health services management journeyman

**Job duties:** Floor supervisor for outpatient records, and 20th MDOS functional area records manager representative

**Hometown:** Marion, S.C.

**Time in service:** Four years

**Family:** Wife, Lee

**Off-duty interests:** Spending time with my wife and family and skateboarding

**Words I live by:** "Do what you can with what you have where you are."