

# Heat Cramps

High temperature and high humidity may lead to heat illness, which can be serious or even life threatening. For people working outdoors in hot weather, temperature & humidity affect how hot they feel. Temperature and humidity are factors in determining the heat index, or the "feels like" temperature. The higher the heat index, the hotter the weather feels. In addition, working in direct sunlight or wearing protective clothing can make conditions "feel" up to 15° F hotter than the heat index temperature!

**Heat Cramps.** Usually affect workers who sweat a lot during strenuous activity. This sweating depletes the body's salt and moisture levels. Low salt levels in muscles causes painful cramps. Heat cramps may also be a symptom of heat exhaustion.

## Heat Cramp Symptoms

Symptoms of heat cramps include:

- Muscle pain or spasms usually in the abdomen, arms, or legs.

## How to Treat Heat Cramps

Treat a worker suffering from heat cramps with the following:

- Stop all activity, and sit in a cool place.
- Drink clear juice or sports beverage.
- Do not return to strenuous work for a few hours after the cramps subside because further exertion may lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Seek medical attention if any of the following apply:
  - The worker has heart problems.
  - The worker is on a low-sodium diet.
  - The cramps do not subside within one hour.

## Heat Illnesses are preventable!

Workers should avoid exposure to extreme heat, sun exposure, and high humidity when possible. When these exposures cannot be avoided, workers should take the following steps to prevent heat stress:

- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting, breathable clothing such as cotton.
  - Avoid non-breathing synthetic clothing.
- Gradually build up to heavy work.
- Schedule heavy work during the coolest parts of day.
- Take more breaks in extreme heat and humidity.
  - Take breaks in the shade or a cool area when possible.
- Drink water frequently. Drink enough water that you never become thirsty. Approximately 1 cup every 15-20 minutes.
- Avoid alcohol, and drinks with large amounts of caffeine or sugar.
- Be aware that protective clothing or personal protective equipment may increase the risk of heat stress.
- Monitor your physical condition and that of your coworkers.

Source: [www.cdc.gov/niosh](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh)

## Remember... Water – Rest – Shade