

Summer weather is here as you very well know and it is time to take precautions against the heat and the sun while running. Running in the Houston summer can be dangerous, just as any hot weather destination, you just have to be cautious and smart about how you do it.

First, let's look at the problems and dangers of running in the heat. There are typically 3 dangers of exercising in the heat.

**Heat Cramps** - This is where there are painful spasms in the legs or abdomen due to over exertion. These kinds of cramps are caused by loss of fluid in the body, and/or by loss of sodium and potassium. If you have heat cramps, apply pressure to the muscle and/or lengthen the tight muscle to make it relax. And of course, replenish your fluids as quickly as possible.

**Heat Exhaustion** - Typically occurs when people exercise heavily in a hot, humid environment (hence Houston) and there is a heavy loss of fluids through sweating. Symptoms include: Heavy sweating, weakness, cold, pale and clammy skin. Weak pulse. Fainting and vomiting are possible.

If you recognize these symptoms, then lie down in a cool place. Loosen clothing. Apply cool wet cloths. Fan or move the person to air-conditioned place. Have the person take sips of water. Take the person to a doctor if needed.

**Heat Stroke** – Also known as Sun Stroke. Now this is a medical emergency. What happens here is that the body's temperature control system, which produces sweating to cool the body, stops working.

Symptoms include a high body temperature (106+). Hot, dry skin. Rapid, strong pulse. and possible unconsciousness. The individual will likely not sweat. You will need to call 911 immediately. In the mean time, get the body as cooled down as fast as possible. **Do not give fluids.**

Now that these are covered, let's look at ways to avoid these dangers. Obviously, the best way to avoid the heat is to train indoors. If you're not a heat person, treadmill running is the way to go, but most of us are not. Sure, we'll do the occasional treadmill run for bad weather days or hill training days, but that's about it. One of the reasons we run is because we love the outdoors.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> best way to avoid the heat is to run before the sun rises or after it sets. Then again, some of us are not early morning people or have the time in the evening to run at 8:00 p.m. So at some point and time, we must run while the sun is shining.

The best way I have learned to run in the heat is to carry fluids (water or sports drinks) with me while I run. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of hydration. Hydrate while running and throughout the day. My rule of thumb is to drink your 64 ounces (which is a minimum each day) plus an ounce for every minute that you run that day. If you're running for an hour or more, I suggest drinking **at least** a quart an hour.

Clothing is important too. Gone are the days of cotton hats, shirts, shorts and socks. Materials like Cool-max, Dri-fit, Dry-line, etcetera dominate the material make-up of exercise clothes now. Cotton absorbs your sweat and keeps it on the shirt, thus not giving you a cooling effect. The quick-drying materials of today take the sweat away from your skin and let it evaporate. Some materials now are SPF rated for sun protection.

Now, since we're on the subject of sun protection, always wear sunscreen. 40 SPF or more is recommended. And always buy the sweat-proof cream or spray.

If you have to run in the heat or in the sun, you can't expect your runs to be fast and furious. Slow down and take your time. Save your speed training workouts for the cooler times of the day. Also, gradually add time to your runs to get accustomed to the heat. Begin at 20 or 30 minute or 3 or 4 mile runs and gradually increase them 5 to 10 minutes or ½ mile a week. If you feel you're not ready to increase the next week, just keep it at the same duration until you feel you're ready to move to that longer run.

So just be smart and cautious out there and daydream of those cooler temps in the fall and winter when you wish it was warmer again.

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