

Outside ARSENAL



Here is all you need to know to PREVENT and PREPARE for potential health obstacles that could hold you back this summer.

By Jessica Ridenour

We've waited patiently through spring showers, early sunsets, and cabin fever. Finally, summer is here. Warm days and longer hours of sunlight mean more time outside, which could open the door to potential summer bummers like sun-fried eyes, dehydration, heat rash, and itchy skin. Let the following information be your guide to a happy and healthy warm-weather season.

SUN-FRIED EYES

Eyes are particularly vulnerable to summer's intense sun. "Sunlight, the UV portion at least, can increase the incidence of cataracts

and macular degeneration," says Dr. Robert Abel, author of *The Eye Care Revolution: Prevent and Reverse Common Vision Problems* (Kensington, 2004). Macular degeneration is the leading cause of vision loss in older people, and recent studies have shown that those who spend more than five hours a day in the sun are twice as likely to develop the affliction later in life.

Sunglasses are the best way to protect your peepers from the summer sun's searing rays. "You need 100 percent UV blocking," advises Dr. Abel, "but it doesn't have to be an expensive lens." Shop for shades with a sticker indicating 100 percent UV absorption or blockage and beware of trendy fashion sunglasses—some block only 60 percent of UV or less. Cyclists and runners can take comfort knowing that a sturdy pair of shades can also deflect random projectiles and other unpleasant surprises. "Good eye protection from both sunlight and trauma is helpful," says the ophthalmologist. "So it should be considered part of safety wear, just like a helmet."

DEHYDRATION

On a hot summer's day or during intense activity, your body sweats to bring fluids to the skin's surface for the evaporative cooling effect. "It's the body's way of keeping the internal temperature from getting too high," says Dr. Amy Day of Soma Acupuncture and Natural Health Clinic in San Francisco. Dehydration can occur when too many fluids are lost, resulting in dry lips, faintness, and even lack of consciousness. Severe dehydration may result in the body's going into shock.

Toting a water bottle may not be enough, however. "With the fluids that go out through the skin, it's not only water but also electrolytes that are given off in the sweat," says Dr. Day, a naturopath. Electrolytes—minerals naturally found in the body, including sodium, potassium, calcium, and magnesium—are what balance the body's fluids and keep the muscles, brain, and heart working the way they should. Dr. Day advises opting for a sports drink if you're going to be active for more than an hour. And regardless of your activity level or the outside temperature, keep in mind that the harder you sweat, the more electrolytes you lose.

Because summer air is typically warmer and drier than at other times of year, imperceptible amounts of sweat are constantly evaporating off the skin, so carry a water bottle with you and stay hydrated all day long.



HEAT RASH

Another common problem of hot summer days is heat rash—also known as prickly heat, due to its hot, stinging sensation. Heat rash begins with excessive sweating, which damages cells on the surface of the skin and traps the sweat underneath, resulting in those painful little bumps. Infants, the elderly, and overweight people are most susceptible to heat rash, but it can affect anyone, particularly in hot, humid climates. Prevent heat rash by wearing lightweight clothing that wicks moisture away from your skin and by avoiding activity during the hottest part of the day.

Heat rash usually goes away on its own in a few days, but you can speed healing by keeping the area cool and dry and by avoiding lotions or anything else that may clog your pores.

ITCHY SKIN

Communing with nature usually involves a few run-ins with antagonistic insects or itch-inducing plants, but knowing how to prevent and treat these little miseries will make you a happier camper.

Ticks share your love of wild, natural places—particularly those that are wooded or grassy, so wear insect repellent. If you find a tick (on yourself or on a pet), use tweezers to grab its head close to the skin and gently pull it straight out without twisting, then dab the area with an antiseptic. Be sure to kill the bloodsucker so it doesn't have a chance to regroup. If a circular rash develops around the bite, especially one that grows rapidly (even after a few weeks have passed), it could be a symptom of Lyme disease, so you should see a doctor as soon as possible.

Stung by a bee? Remove the stinger by scraping it in a side-to-side motion, then wash the welt thoroughly to flush out the irritant. Usually, a sting will cause only minor pain and swelling, but vomiting, rapid heartbeat and/or difficulty breathing warrants a trip to the hospital. People with a serious bee allergy can go into anaphylactic shock. Keep the bees at bay by avoiding scented soaps and perfumes and by keeping food and drinks covered while outside.

With poison oak, ivy, and sumac, the first step is prevention. “Know what grows in your area and how to identify it,” says Dr. Day. If you end up tangling with any of these wicked weeds, wash your skin and clothing (and also your dog!) as quickly as possible (ideally, within 10 to 15 minutes) to remove the plant oils that cause the allergic reaction. Some lucky folks can go without washing for up to four hours without developing a rash.

Now all you need is a generous layer of SPF 30 and you're ready for whatever adventures the season has to offer.

Ailments & Remedies

Ailment: Sun-Fried Eyes

Remedy: Besides donning a brimmed hat and 100 percent UV-blocking sunglasses, protect your eyes against ravaging free radicals with antioxidants like vitamin C, vitamin E, and lutein. Help yourself to some spinach, collard greens, and citrus to ensure that your eyes are getting what they need.



Ailment: Dehydration

Remedy: Move to a cool, shady spot and loosen or remove unnecessary clothing. Slowly drink a low-sugar electrolyte-infused drink like R.W. Knudsen Family's Recharge (available at health food stores). You can also make your own with the following recipe, courtesy of Dr. Day.

REHYDRATION SOLUTION

Add the following to 1 liter of drinking water:
2 to 4 tablespoons sugar or honey
1/4 teaspoon sodium chloride salt
1/4 teaspoon potassium chloride salt
1/4 teaspoon baking soda (sodium bicarbonate)

Optional: 1/2 cup juice to improve taste

Ailment: Heat Rash

Remedy: Apply a cold compress or add a knotted sock full of raw oatmeal to cool bathwater, then soak. Stay as cool as possible.

Ailment: Itchy Skin

Remedy: To repel insects naturally, apply a citrus-scented oil such as citronella or use DEET-free Buzz Away, which is available online at www.mothenature.com. To soothe itchy skin, apply a cold compress or smooth on aloe vera gel or calendula gel (both available at health food stores).