

Heat Cramps Treatment Guidelines Handout

What are heat cramps?

Heat cramps are painful muscle spasms that occur during or after intense physical activity in hot or humid conditions. They are caused by electrolyte imbalances, particularly sodium and potassium, due to excessive sweating.

Symptoms of heat cramps

- Painful muscle cramps, usually in the abdomen, arms, or legs
 - Excessive sweating
 - Muscle weakness or fatigue
 - Tightness in muscles
 - Nausea or vomiting in some cases
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Treatment

1. Move to a cool area:

Immediately move the individual to a shaded or air-conditioned area.

2. Rest and hydration:

Instruct the patient to rest in a comfortable position and encourage them to drink fluids. Cool water is ideal, but electrolyte-rich drinks like sports drinks can help restore electrolyte balance lost through sweating.

3. Cooling measures:

Apply cool, damp cloths to the skin or use a fan to promote evaporative cooling. Avoid direct exposure to ice or extremely cold water, as this can cause shivering and constrict blood vessels, potentially limiting heat dissipation.

4. Monitor:

Continuously monitor the patient's condition. If symptoms persist or worsen despite initial treatment, consider seeking medical attention promptly.

Prevention

- Stay hydrated before, during, and after physical activity in hot weather.
 - Avoid strenuous activities during the hottest part of the day.
 - Wear lightweight, loose-fitting clothing.
 - Acclimate gradually to hot or humid environments.
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When to seek medical help

Seek immediate medical attention if:

- Symptoms do not improve with self-care measures.
- The individual has a history of heat-related illness.
- Symptoms worsen or include confusion, fainting, or seizures.