

WHAT MOST DON'T DO ABOUT THE HEAT



August is here. The school year is just a few weeks out and the outdoor practices for softball and football are upon us once again. As is usually the case during this time of the year, the temperature goes up and the humidity seems to 'thicken.' Likewise, many parents, coaches, etc...

connected to athletics receive some form of education about the dangers of extreme heat and humidity. However, over years of experience with this message, most in the sports medicine community hear the large message about safety in the heat boiled down to the simple phrase of "just stay hydrated." When in fact, a heat illness is much more than that. It is actually a heat injury that is multifaceted in its causation. Yes, hydration is huge, but it isn't the sole pillar of heat illness prevention.

For example, the simplest answer to competing successfully in the heat is staying cool. Sadly though, interventions such as misting areas, cool towels, shaded areas, and variations in equipment that can truly make all the difference are often left out.

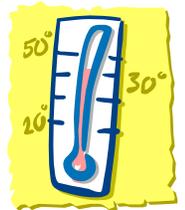
Remember that a heat illness is just that, a heat injury. Therefore, every effort to keep your athletes cool can reduce your overall risk. In other words, in the hottest time of the year, imagine what a 5 minute cold mist-tent (i.e. shade) break every 30 minutes could do for your athlete's stamina, attentiveness, and responsiveness to your instruction and coaching. The difference is astonishing! Ask any athletic trainer or high-level football coach around, cooling breaks make a huge difference when practicing in the heat.

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The Athletic Trainer: The Best Way to Beat the Heat

Imagine the following scenario:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| -9:00am | FB px Starts with full-pads |
| -9:45am | Johnny staggers to his coach. He's disoriented, confused, his face is flushed, and he is sweating intensely. He is given a water bottle and the helmet is removed. |
| -9:55am | Johnny passes out, EMS is called |
| -10:05am | EMS arrives |
| -10:25am | EMS transports Johnny |
| -10:45am | Johnny arrives at the ER |



What's wrong with the scenario?

If you calculate the time from when Johnny first reached his coach until the time Johnny reached the ER, 1 hour had passed. So, his core body temperature has been significantly elevated for at least that amount of time, probably more. And, an elevated core temp is seriously dangerous to the body's neurological and circulatory systems for any amount of time, especially an hour.

What should occur?

The athlete who shows signs and symptoms of heat illness and distress should be immediately evaluated by an Athletic Trainer. All unnecessary equipment should be removed, and the athlete should be cooled immediately with monitoring under specific medical care protocols.

Consider your plans for the hot days.

Can you have an Athletic Trainer on-sight and the appropriate interventions ready to go at a moment's notice? It can make all the difference!

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Dehydration & Leg Cramps

The last two weeks of August are usually pretty quiet from a heat illness standpoint. Most athletes have acclimatized to the heat and the scrimmages that occur usually offer significant amounts of rest. However, fast forward to the first Friday night of the fall football season; September 5th, 2014. With the heat still very much present and multiple athletes playing both ways, dehydration and cramping is no longer a question of if but when. Sadly though, after an athlete begins to suffer a dehydration-related cramp, the body can only absorb water and electrolytes through oral hydration at a limited rate. In actuality, true recovery from oral hydration can take, at minimum, 30 minutes to an hour, thus ending the night for most football players. However, simple measures can alleviate most problems.

#1. Adequate hydration should be a Life-Style; not a pregame warm-up.

-If you're unsuccessful with water, add in with current hydration an electrolyte fluid like Gatorade or Pedialyte. Whereas Gatorade is meant directly for sport, Pedialyte has less sugar and can be absorbed quicker.

#2. Never underestimate the intensity and demands of the first game.

-Again, find ways to stay cool. Mist tents and cool towels use sources outside the body for cooling, thus saving the body water and reducing overall water and electrolyte loss. Every ounce of water used for cooling on the outside is an ounce of water that the body didn't have to give up!

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Helmet & Pads: Heat Insulators

Perhaps the easiest adjustment to make and also the most infrequently used intervention, modifying equipment for the day's practice is seldom done. Because full pads and helmets actually absorb heat and hold it next to the body, they are a tremendous detriment to keeping the body cool. No, helmets and pads can never go away. And athletes, for their own health, must acclimatize to the demands of the heat, full equipment included. However, several of the drills completed in practices could actually occur without shoulder pads and/or helmets.

- Warm-up and Stretching
- Conditioning
- Non-Contact Footwork Drills
- QB with Wide Receivers & Tight Ends
- QB with Running Backs & Tail Backs
- O-Line/D-Line footwork
- Any other event not requiring contact

Helmets and shoulder pads should always be around for athlete safety. However, always keep in mind that the cooler the athlete, the better they will perform. When the body is cool, the brain works better, coordination is better, reaction time is faster, and attention span is longer.

In short, the cooler athlete will almost always

- Out Learn
- Out Work
- Out Perform, and
- Outlast the athlete who gets hot.

Coolness is a Tremendous Athletic Advantage and it is ALWAYS safer for your kids!

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