

## **Caution to Outdoor Workers: Drink Before You Become Thirsty**

Anyone who spends most of the day working outdoors should take care to drink sufficient quantities of liquids to avoid dehydration—a condition that can result in heat stroke or even death. This is true in **all** seasons, but particularly in the summer months.

There are many factors that put an outdoor worker at risk for dehydration. Examples of these are extreme temperatures, wind, sun and physical exertion. Those who are outside for long periods of time should take the following precautions:

- always wear a hat with a brim.
- wear loose, breathable clothes.
- use sunscreen in the summer, as sunburn prevents the skin from adequately cooling itself and can result in dehydration.
- avoid alcoholic beverages
- if coffee is the beverage of choice, drink extra liquid ( for example, drink 1 cup of coffee and 1 cup of water).
- drink fluids throughout the day.



A useful rule of thumb is to drink a couple of cups of water before going outside, followed by a cup of cold water (cold is more rapidly absorbed) every 15-20 minutes throughout the work day. Some people prefer to drink sports drinks. That’s fine, but they are not really necessary. A normal diet provides minerals and salts necessary to replace losses due to exertion. However, if sports drinks are used, they can be diluted with water (5 parts water to 1 part sports drink).

Thirst is often considered a reliable signal that we need to drink. In reality, you are well on your way to becoming dehydrated by the time you are “thirsty”. It is important for people who work outside to monitor their urine output. Dark and scant urine is a sign of dehydration. Also, if working in extreme conditions, it is advisable for workers to weigh themselves in the morning before work and again in the evening. If there is weight loss, it is likely due to dehydration. Two cups of water will replenish one pound of weight loss. Workers should be aware if they experience fatigue, dizziness, headaches, dry nasal passages and lips, they are probably becoming dehydrated.

There are certain groups of people who may be at risk for dehydration:

- people who sweat a lot.
- people who are overweight.
- older people (their ability to sweat declines as does their ability to feel thirsty).
- people on some medications (e.g., diuretics, etc.). Check with your doctor.
- anyone who doesn’t drink enough water!

In summary, dehydration can be dangerous if left unheeded. Therefore it is important for outdoor workers to take precautions - the most important of which is to drink, drink, drink!

*Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Extreme Heat: A prevention Guide to Promote Your Personal Health and Safety, 1996.*

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