

# **Expert discusses ways to stay heart healthy, hydrated and fit during the summer**

July 23 2015, by Leha Byrd

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Summer can be a lazy time. Cookouts, vacations, graduation parties and similar events may tempt us to throw caution to the wind when it comes to maintaining a healthy lifestyle, particularly as it relates to diet and exercise. However, experts at the Pauley Heart Center, part of Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center, suggest being ever mindful of lifestyle habits that promote good heart health.

The summer months are an especially critical time for heart health because of the risks of dehydration and other heat-related illnesses. Bethany Denlinger, M.D., medical director of the Cardiology Lab at VCU Community Memorial Hospital in South Hill, Virginia, answered questions about hydration, exercise, eating and basic good heart health in the summer months.

## **What is the significance of staying hydrated as it relates to a healthy heart?**

Your heart has to work harder if you are dehydrated. Your muscles do not work efficiently without proper hydration. Hydrate throughout the day, not just before exercise. Water is best. Mix it up with flavored waters or sparkling water. Keep a water bottle within reach. Avoid sodas and alcohol. Additionally, monitor your urine. If you are drinking enough water, it should be clear or light yellow, not cloudy and dark. If you weigh yourself before and after exercise, consume 16-20 ounces of fluid for every pound lost.

## **Considering typical summer events such as cookouts, graduation celebrations, etc., what are some tips for eating healthy and thoughtfully?**

Consider healthy choices at your family events. Choose lean beef and make smaller hamburger patties. Grill chicken or salmon. Eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. They contain nutrients that you lose when you sweat. Enjoy seasonal food, peaches, watermelon, strawberries, tomatoes, cantaloupes. Try new healthy foods like kale, spinach or red beets. Eat desserts in moderation.

## **Describe the appropriate attire and accessories to stay cool and regulate your body temperature during the summer months?**

Wear single-layer, absorbent, loose-fitting clothing, preferably light colors. Look for "wicking" fabrics. Carry a water bottle and consider a water belt.

## **What types of exercises and preventive actions are appropriate during the summer months for a person who has heart issues?**

Don't give up. If you can stay active, you should. Walk on the treadmill indoors. Exercise at a cardiac rehab center with blood pressure and heart rate monitoring. Take more breaks. Rest in a shaded area. Exercise early in the day. Gradually begin your exercise and gradually cool off. Pay attention to the heat index which takes into account for humidity and temperature. With strenuous activity, alternate water with [sports drinks](#).

## **What are the adverse effects of not taking care of your heart health, with proper diet and exercise, during any season?**

No exercise leads to deconditioning. Deconditioning leads to muscle weakness. With deconditioning, the heart does not work efficiently.

## **What are common issues experienced during the summer months by individuals who have heart issues?**

In the summer, there are more hospital admissions for congestive heart failure. If the heart muscle is weak, there is a difficult balance between drinking too much fluid and dehydration. It is important to weigh yourself daily. Avoid too much salt in your diet. Seek medical assistance if your weight is increasing and you are more short of breath and notice swelling. It is also important to take your [blood pressure](#) at home. Blood pressure medicines may exaggerate the body's response to heat.

## **What are the signs that a person with heart issues needs to seek medical attention?**

With regard to a heart patient's summer cautions, there are three heat-related conditions – heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Heat cramps are muscle pains and spasm. You should drink sports drinks and water. Heat exhaustion is a more severe condition. Apply cool cloths to the skin and drink sports drinks and water in small amounts. Heat stroke means you have a temperature of 104 degrees and brain symptoms. This is life-threatening. Call 911 and douse the person with cold water or ice. The early symptoms are nausea, vomiting, dizziness, fast heart rate and fatigue. If symptoms are not improving with hydration seek medical

attention. The severity of heat illness may not be apparent in the initial presentation.

Provided by Virginia Commonwealth University

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