

features

Heat, humidity are jogging foes

By Jac Versteeg

On even the hottest, muggiest days you can see runners stumbling along, puffing, dripping with sweat and looking as if they are about to die. Well, they may be.

The combination of high heat and high humidity, both abundant during Chapel Hill summers, can cause illness or death, experts say. The following information, gleaned from material written by James F. Fixx, author of *The Book of Running*, and the editors of *Runner's World*, may help you avoid some of the hazards of heat.

When you run or perform any vigorous exercise your body produces excess heat. There are several ways in which your body tries to dissipate that heat. Sweating is the body's primary cooling system. When sweat evaporates from your skin, heat is drawn off. The body also tries to control heat by diverting blood from internal organs to vessels closer to the skin where cooling can occur.

As long as your cooling system functions properly, heat poses no problem. But heat and humidity can act together to make the body's natural air conditioning malfunction.

Muggy weather can get you into trouble with the heat in two basic ways. High temperatures cause the body to sweat a great deal. If your workout is long and you do not drink sufficient liquid to replenish body fluids during the workout, your body simply can run out of the water it needs to keep you cool. When that happens, dehydration occurs.

High humidity can make your body's cooling system break down in another way. When it is humid the air is filled with water, and sweat can't evaporate quickly enough to cool your body sufficiently. When that happens, the body tries to catch up by sweating even more, and that can cause dehydration.

Both dehydration and the body's inability to cool quickly enough in humid weather can cause three health hazards.

Heat cramping is the least severe of the problems and can serve as a warning that you're starting to get into trouble. If you get cramps, Fixx suggests simple massage and a half glass of salt water every 15 minutes for an hour.

Heat exhaustion is a more severe problem and is caused by water loss and a large diversion of blood to the skin's surface. The slight dehydration and decrease in blood flow to the brain can cause confusion or unconsciousness.

A heat exhaustion victim should lie down, keep his legs elevated, take salt water, and keep his body cool with wet cloths or fanning.

Heat stroke is the most dangerous problem heat and humidity can cause. In heat stroke, the body's cooling system fails and body temperature may rise to 110 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. A heat stroke victim's skin is usually hot and dry. Other symptoms are dizziness, vomiting, diarrhea and confusion.

If you think you're dealing with a heat stroke victim, obtain medical help immediately. It is also important to lower the victim's body temperature at once using cool water or rubbing alcohol.



Staff photo by Jack Mohr

Jogger running on campus Tuesday heat and humidity can be dangerous

Coping with the heat may force you to alter your training schedule by cutting back on distance, or by running at the coolest time of day—early in the morning or after sunset.

Ron Latham, a runner who puts in five to 10 miles every day, says he has found a way to cope with Chapel Hill summers. "When I first came here I ran once—once—when it was 94 degrees. I sweated it five miles and nearly died. Then I switched to running in the evening, but it doesn't get cool sometimes until after 9:00 and running at night is dangerous.

"So, I bit the bullet and started running about 6 a.m. or even earlier. It's almost always cool enough then. As a general rule, I've found that starting my run in time to finish by 8 a.m. is the best policy," Latham said.

The *Weather Service Operations Manual* provides some guidelines for deciding when it's too hot and humid to run.

At 75 degrees running is safe until humidity rises above 95 percent. Then, extra caution is advised.

- At 80 degrees running is safe up to 60 percent humidity. Use caution if humidity is between 60 and 90 percent. Above 90 percent, consider a training cutback.

- At 85 degrees running is safe only when humidity is below 30 percent. Use caution between 30 and 60 percent. Cut back between 60 and 90 percent. Don't run above 90 percent.

- At 90 degrees running is safe only when humidity is below 15 percent. Use caution between 15 and 35 percent. Cut back between 35 and 65 percent. Don't run above 65 percent.

- At 95 degrees cut back up to 45 percent humidity. Don't run above 45 percent.

- At 100 degrees go swimming.

Local group makes debut in new style

"We wanted to debut on Friday the 13th," said Rob Keely, bass player for the re-formed band Secret Service, "because the date relates so closely to kitchen appliances, especially toasters."

The new Secret Service has been playing together for three months, and will debut at Cat's Cradle this weekend. They will be performing a wider variety of music and more original material than the old group did. "We'll be adventurous—playing a wide spectrum of music—pop, new waves and blues," Keely said.

The new group also plays better than the old band did, he said, and has been improved by the addition of two very strong musicians—Gardner Govan on lead guitar and Bob Northcott on rhythm guitar and vocals.

Although the band considered adopting a new name, they decided to keep the old one so they wouldn't lose their local following.

The fourth member of the group is the drummer Chris Chamis. He and Keely were in the original band.

"We're anxious for people to come out and not make comparisons to the old group, though inevitably they will," Keely said. "I just want everybody to come out and have a large time."

The band will play Friday and Saturday nights at the Cat's Cradle. You also can have a large time with them on Thursday, June 19, at The Pier in Raleigh.

—Dorothy Rompalske

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