



The Complete Health and Wellness Newsletter – Serving ProHealthNet Clients

## *Heat Illness: Dangerous but Preventable*



People who engage in high-intensity physical activities, such as athletes and outdoor laborers, run the risk of heat illness (heat exhaustion and heat stroke). The hot, humid days of summer increase the likelihood of a heat illness event, as does being overweight and unfit. The good news: heat illness is easily preventable by following some basic guidelines.

**Allow for acclimation.** The body needs to transition into hot environments. Increase practice time and duration in the heat slowly over a two-week period.

**Frequent breaks.** Breaks allow the individual the opportunity to rest and recover from their physical output. Cooling down is also a result if shade is provided. It should be recognized that a person's physical output is generally greater following a break.

**Think hydration.** Staying properly hydrated is a critical step in preventing heat illness. Fluids must be readily available at all times. Coaches, supervisors, and other authority figures must encourage and monitor the hydration effects of all those under their charge.

**Don't rely on water alone.** Water alone may not be enough to handle the hydration needs of active individuals. Research has shown that sports drinks can improve performance in both long-term and short-term activities. Also, sports drinks with appropriate amounts of sodium help maintain fluid levels within

the body. Plain water, on the other hand, stimulates kidney activity and leads to greater urine output.

**Dress for the conditions.** Loose-fitting clothes and a broad-brimmed hat generally provide for the best cooling.

## New Website for ProHealthNet

Notice anything different? Beginning with this issue, ProHealthNet's quarterly newsletter has received a facelift. The company website is also up and running with health tips, client spotlight articles, seminar listings, links to useful fire and health related websites, and a variety of articles on everything from time management to dieting advice.

Please take a moment to check us out online at [www.prohealthnet.com](http://www.prohealthnet.com) and see for yourself. If you have any suggestions for additional content or questions about the website, please feel free to send an email to [webmaster@prohealthnet.com](mailto:webmaster@prohealthnet.com).

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# A Healthy Dose of Television

A large, long term study recently appeared in *The Lancet Medical Journal* (July 2004) and serves as an indictment of childhood and adolescent television watching. The subjects were followed for close to 25 years with their television viewing habits assessed multiple times during these years. Youthful television watching was found to have staggering health consequences in adulthood. Watching television for 2 hours a day between the ages of 5 to 15 lead to elevated cholesterol levels, decreased physical fitness, increased smoking, and increased obesity in adulthood.

In today's world, the problem is compounded by the amount of time children spend in front of a computer. According to Dr. William Klish, professor of pediatrics at Baylor University, "Most kids average five to six hours a day in front of some type of monitor." Ouch - you do the math.

The connection between television (and other monitor time) and poor health in adulthood appears to be that these lifestyle habits contribute to inactivity and overeating. Realizing the health problems associated with television watching, the American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that children be limited to 1 to 2 hours a day.

Based on the study published in *The Lancet*, one hour a day would be a smarter choice. The key to healthy television time is parental involvement. The following tips may help your child develop healthier television habits.

## Be a role model

It's tough to limit a child's "monitor time" if the parent spends their work time, most of their entertainment time, and family time in front of a monitor.

## Earn television and monitor time

Set up a system where children earn television or computer time. Define how much time

the child must participate in physical activities and other healthy lifestyle habits before monitor time is awarded.

## Start early

Establish healthy television habits during the preschool years when many obesity-causing habits are developed.

## Encourage participation in physical activities

Expose the child to numerous physical activity opportunities and strongly encourage their participation. These opportunities could be school-related athletics, community supported sporting activities, or clubs that involve physical movement.

## ProHealthNet

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## Steve Little, Gettin' It Done

Steve Little is getting it done despite his claim, "I'm getting older." As the Hotshot Supervisor for the Asheville (North Carolina) Hotshots, Steve knows he and his crew must make fitness a high priority. "The job doesn't require maximum performance all the time. But when it does, you better have it (fitness)," states Little.

The path to what Little calls his "dream job" started back in 1990 when he was a Recreation Wilderness Technician for the State of Georgia. The path then took him to the USDA Forest Service - Savannah River in South Carolina, where he was first a fire fighter and later an Engine Captain. In 1999, Steve took the Asheville Assistant Hotshot Supervisor position in 1999 and in 2003 he became the Hotshot Supervisor.

Steve admits that maintaining the appropriate level of fitness for his job has become more difficult over the years. However, the difficulty is not due to physical changes related to age but rather the increase in administrative

demands of the job. Little comments, "It's a lot harder to get it (physical training) done but you just have to make a commitment to PT."

And get it done he does. Steve's off-season weekly exercise routine includes 20 to 25 miles of running, 3 strength training (Bow Flex) sessions, and multiple sets of chin ups, dips, crunches, and push ups. A couple of months before the crew comes in, he incorporates his legendary "buns of steel" routine which involves squats, wall sits, and lunges with 2 minutes of jumping rope between each set. Robin Kastler, a Fire Ecologist and Training Officer for the U.S. Forest Service in Asheville, did the routine a couple of times last year. "I had to take the stairs one at a time for 5 days after those sessions," states Kastler.

Steve has his crew participate in the "buns" routine and it often leads to a condition Little calls "Coco-Gorilla Butt." Not sure what "Coco-Gorilla Butt" is? Think back to the last National Geographic Africa special you watched. Remember the pictures of the large male Silverback gorilla named "Coco"? Big hindquarters and an awkward walk. Now, you've got the picture.

Steve is known for his dedicated work ethic and for always finishing what he starts. He also understands the need for a balance between fire and the rest of life. If Steve is out after hours with a group of fire folks and the conversation turns to fire, he will set his watch for 10 minutes. If anyone talks about work and fire after those 10 minutes – they buy the next round of adult beverages.

Steve Little – fit, balanced, buns of steel, and gettin' it done!



# Can Physical Activity Be a Tranquilizer?



## Exercise & Anxiety Reduction

The physiological benefits of physical activity, such as reductions in body fat percentage, improvements in blood pressure and lipid profiles, and generally reduced risk for cardiac events have been well chronicled and now the psychological benefits of physical activity are also becoming more established. For example, anyone who has engaged in a regular exercise program knows that we just “feel better” psychologically, emotionally, and even spiritually after exercising.

The term “runners high” is often used to describe the psychological boost one gets from exercising. This phenomenon is so pervasive that a recent study identified 27 different terms or phrases to describe the concept of the “runners high” (Berger, 1996). Commonly used phrases used to describe runners high include: euphoria, heightened well-being, a feeling of liberation, suppressed pain or discomfort, complete relaxation, and effortless-ness. All of these phrases, which describe a high state of psychological and emotional health, suggest that physical activity may be a useful tool in helping individuals who suffer from anxiety.

The question that remains to be answered, however, is what *exactly* is the correct dose of physical activity necessary to reduce anxiety symptoms in a meaningful way?

Most research on the effects of exercise has focused on the reduction of state anxiety (meaning “in the moment” versus trait anxiety, which refers to long-term) symptoms. Several studies (Focht &

Hausenblaus, 2001; Ekkekakis, Hall & Petruzzello, 1999) have confirmed that exercise does have a tranquilizing effect on both the mind and body. The tranquilizing effect, however, appears to be short-term. In fact, studies (Raglin and Morgan, 1987; Seeman, 1978) suggest that the tranquilizing effect lasts somewhere between 2 and 6 hours, with virtually everyone returning to “normal” anxiety levels within a 24 hour period. The effect tends to be stronger and longer lasting when intensity and duration (or both) are increased.

Furthermore, longer training programs (i.e., those conducted over months rather than days) have provided more meaningful changes in well-being than shorter ones (Weinberg & Gould, 2003). The effect seems to work for all participants (e.g., males and fe-

males, fit versus unfit, anxious and non-anxious, younger and older). Most modes of exercise seem to work in reducing anxiety, however the strongest “hit” comes from engagement in aerobic (e.g., long distance running, cycling, cross-country skiing) versus anaerobic (e.g., weight training).

To use physical activity and get maximum reduction in anxiety, try the following five-step “formula”:

First, check with your physician and make sure that engagement in a physical activity program is safe for you. This “formula” is only for healthy individuals who can safely tolerate fairly high intensity exercise. If you do not fit into this healthy category, your physician can direct you to drug or psychotherapies that will be about as effective as the program outlined here.

Secondly, identify which mode of exercise will work best for your body type. Running is the mode which seems to produce the most powerful benefits in reducing anxiety, however, running is not for everyone. Lower impact aerobic exercises such as swimming, cycling, and cross-country skiing will

***Physical activity may be a useful tool in helping individuals who suffer from anxiety.***

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## *The Challenges of Extended Caregiving*

If you are a woman, with new medical advances prolonging life expectancies, the chances of becoming a long-term caregiver to a disabled or seriously ill spouse are greater now than ever before. Extended caregiving can be an emotional roller coaster. And, without proper planning, it can be financially devastating. When faced with the prospect of a spouse's serious illness, only one thing is certain: for now, all the responsibilities are on your shoulders.

It is likely that in addition to the physical caregiving responsibilities that have passed to you, all legal, financial and health-care-related decisions will become yours as well. Taking charge as the proxy decision maker won't be easy, particularly if your spouse resists giving up his role, however necessary that may be.

Plan to "gently" take on the role of sole decision maker in your household. Start by identifying and surrounding yourself with professionals who can provide you with current information, resources and common-sense advice on personal financial matters and legal issues. The more advocates you have to support you during this uncertain time, the easier your transition should be.

Consider your caregiving options. Make a detailed plan now. By planning ahead and anticipating certain needs before your situation becomes overwhelming, you can avoid having to make important decisions during a time of crisis.

List the things you may need help with, now or in the future. List all your informal support contacts (e.g., family, friends, neighbors) and decide how each person might help meet your needs. Repeat the list for formal support services (e.g., community services, home care workers, adult day care programs). It is important to set a realistic time

frame for any action planned. Of course, make an appointment with an attorney knowledgeable in estate planning, probate, and, if possible, public benefits planning.

What types of care should you consider and how will you fund them? A professional familiar with your spouse's specific health issues, your current caregiving situation and community resources can often facilitate your decision. Explore every option with the help of an attorney or other professional who specializes in elder care, as well as a financial advocate before taking any decisive steps.

While you still have time together, track down all financial accounts; keys to safe deposit boxes; important identification papers such as birth and marriage certificates, deeds to property, vehicle registrations, military records, Social Security cards, naturalization cards and insurance policies; and existing estate planning documents, such as your will or irrevocable trust or agreement.

Update your will. As an essential part of your family's estate plan, a will establishes who receives your assets and how they will be distributed. Dying without the benefit of a will leaves the laws of your state to decide the division and distribution of your property. It can also create unwanted estate tax consequences.

What's more, your will could explicitly address who will manage your spouse's assets in the event of your death, and how much of your assets you wish to set aside for this purpose.

***By planning ahead and anticipating certain needs before your situation becomes overwhelming, you can avoid having to make important decisions during a time of crisis.***

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***Exercise & Anxiety Reduction (from page 4)***

also work and are much easier on your body.

Thirdly, began collecting “data” on how much intensity and how long of duration is necessary for you to experience the tranquilizing effect of physical activity. Typically, you will want to do the LEAST amount of intensity and the LEAST amount of duration necessary to produce the effect. If you are new to exercising, start with 10 -15 minutes of low intensity exercise (say 40 – 60% of your capacity).

Fourth, keep a journal which chronicles how you “feel” after each bout of exercise. If the low duration and low intensity program does not produce the desired anxiety reduction effect, then slowly began to “manipulate” one variable at a time. For example, many people find that if they do a very “hard” workout (say a 5 minute warm-up followed by 5 - 7 minutes at 80 - 90% effort followed by a 5 minute cool-down for 20 - 25 minutes total) they will typically have to do less duration to produce the desired effect. If they don’t feel like going “hard,” then longer duration (say 30 minutes or more at a steady 50 – 70%

effort) is usually necessary for reductions in anxiety. Remember, the effect is very individual, so you will need to collect data on yourself to determine the “threshold” necessary (in terms of intensity and duration) to feel good.

Finally, begin to “meter” the number of days where you go very hard. Most people can only tolerate one or two days per week at high intensity. NO ONE can go hard everyday without breaking down, even if you are engaged in low impact activities such as swimming or cycling.

It may take a few weeks to determine where your thresholds lay, but most people will experience meaningful short-term reductions in anxiety on this program. The key to this “formula” is consistency. If you do not experience the response you desire within a few weeks, then a consultation with your physician is warranted.

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