

Facts and Fiction

Fiction: Beer and other alcoholic beverages satisfy thirst in excessive heat.

Facts: Although beer and alcoholic beverages appear to satisfy thirst, they actually cause further body dehydration. You should limit your intake of alcoholic beverages in excessive heat. Drink plenty of water. Your body needs water to keep cool. Drink plenty of fluids even if you do not feel thirsty. (People who have epilepsy or heart, kidney, or liver disease; are on fluid-restricted diets; or have a problem with fluid retention should consult a physician before increasing their consumption of fluids.)

Fiction: It's always good to exercise, no matter how hot it is.

Facts: Many heat emergencies are experienced by people exercising or working during the hottest parts of the day. Reduce, eliminate, or reschedule strenuous activities. If you must do strenuous activity, do it during the coolest part of the day which is usually in the morning between 4:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m.

Fiction: A heatstroke (sunstroke) is not life-threatening.

Facts: A heatstroke or sunstroke is life threatening. If someone has heatstroke, his or her temperature control system, which produces sweat to cool the body, stops working. The body temperature can rise so high that brain damage and death may result if the body is not cooled quickly.

Fiction: You will get sunburned only on really hot days.

Facts: Sunburn (and tanning) results from exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which is distinct from the light and heat emitted by the sun. You cannot see or feel UV rays. They can, however, be quite damaging. UV exposure has been linked to skin cancer and other skin disorders, cataracts and other eye damage, and immune-system suppression. The ozone layer absorbs most of the sun's harmful UV rays, but this layer has thinned in recent years as a result of the emission of ozone-depleting chemicals. This thinning can lead to a greater chance of overexposure to UV radiation. To protect yourself:

- Limit time in the midday sun.
- Seek shade.
- Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen of at least SPF15+ and reapply it every two hours.
- Wear a hat, protective clothing, and sunglasses.
- Watch for the UV Index (reported in local news and newspapers).

UV exposure is a year-round issue—you can sustain damage on the ski slopes just as easily as on the beach, and clouds provide only partial protection. For more information, visit <http://www.epa.gov/sunwise>.