Beat the Summer Heat

Summer heat can be more than uncomfortable; it can threaten your health, especially for older adults and children. Hot and humid weather can make it more challenging for your body to cool down, leading to heat-related illnesses. If left untreated, heat-related illnesses can become life-threatening. In fact, heat-related deaths have been on the rise in the United States.

The CDC reports that heat-related deaths in the country have been increasing, with approximately 1,602 occurring in 2021, 1,722 in 2022, and 2,302 in 2023.

Exposure to abnormal or prolonged heat and humidity without relief or adequate fluids can cause various heat-related illnesses. Here are some common types of illnesses to keep an eye out for this summer:

- **Heat cramps** are a mild form of heat illness consisting of painful muscle cramps and spasms. These occur during or after intense exercise and sweating in high heat, so moving to a cool place to rest and stretch cramped muscles is important.

- **Heat exhaustion** occurs when a person cannot sweat enough to cool the body, usually due to not drinking enough fluids during hot weather. A person suffering from heat exhaustion must move to a cool place and drink plenty of water.

- **Heatstroke** occurs when your body temperature reaches 104 F or higher within minutes. The person may also become confused or lose consciousness. The condition is the result of untreated heat exhaustion and a serious medical emergency that must be treated quickly by a professional.

Don't let the summer heat get the best of you. Consider these tips to prevent heat-related illness:

- Drink plenty of fluids, but avoid alcoholic and caffeinated beverages (e.g., coffee, tea and soda) that can lead to dehydration.

- Eat light, refreshing foods.

- Wear lightweight, light-colored and loose-fitting clothing.

- Apply sunscreen and wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.

- Do chores or other outdoor activities in the morning or evening.

- Stay indoors as much as possible, or take breaks from being outside.

Remembering these tips can help you beat the heat. Contact a doctor if heat-related symptoms don't improve within an hour and seek immediate medical attention if the person has heatstroke.