

## 10

top hot-weather  
health  
hazards  
(and how to  
beat them)

by Margit Feury

**The hazard:** Sunburn

**Treat it:** Take ibuprofen and apply an anesthetic spray or a cold compress to ease pain and reduce swelling, advises William G. Kristan, M.D., chairman of the emergency department at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center in Passavant. If you develop blisters or intense pain, consult your doctor.

**Prevent it:** Always wear a broad-spectrum SPF 30 sunscreen or higher, even on cloudy days, and reapply every two hours. Make sure it's waterproof if you plan to swim or exercise. If you must be outside when the heat is most intense (from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M.), wear a light long-sleeved shirt, long pants and a wide-brimmed hat. Note that certain medications, including antibiotics, birth control pills and Retin-A, can make your skin more susceptible to burning.



PREVENT CHAPPING  
AND COLD SORES  
BY WEARING AN  
SPF 15 LIP BALM.

**The hazard:** Cold Sores

**Treat it:** Sun exposure can trigger cold sores in people infected with the herpes simplex I virus (which is generally responsible for oral outbreaks). The sores clear up on their own, but you can speed the healing with Acyclovir, an oral antiviral medication. Avoid touching a sore for three days after it appears, because it can spread to the genitals, open wounds or mucous membranes, warns Ronald M. Davis, M.D., a member of

the American Medical Association board of trustees. Use a new applicator when applying or removing makeup to avoid spreading the infection from your lip to your eyes. If you do touch the sore, wash the contact point with soap and water.

**Prevent it:** Always wear lip balm with an SPF of 15 or higher, and avoid severe chapping. A healthy immune system will deter future outbreaks, so keep it revved by getting adequate sleep and avoiding excess stress.

## The hazard: Yeast Infections

**Treat it:** Use an over-the-counter cream medication to stop the annoying itching, painful burning and white cottage cheese-like discharge. All creams containing an ingredient ending in *-azole* (such as Miconazole, found in Monistat), work equally well, according to a report in the *Medical Letter on Drugs and Therapeutics*. If you're experiencing these symptoms for the first time, however, or you are unsure whether it's a yeast infection, see your doctor for an accurate diagnosis.

**Prevent it:** Keep your vaginal area dry, since moisture provides a breeding ground for yeast infections, says Teresa H. Cheon, M.D., an assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at New York University School of Medicine. That means taking off damp bathing suits and workout wear promptly, drying off thoroughly after showering, wearing cotton underwear and avoiding tight pants. Some studies indicate that drinking cranberry juice and eating yogurt may help prevent recurrent infections.

## The hazard: Exercise-Induced Chafing

**Treat it:** Wash the painful, rug-burn-like irritations—usually on underarms, crotch, thighs or nipples—with a gentle soap and water. Cover the affected area with a sterile cotton pad and keep as dry as possible.

**Prevent it:** Before exercising, apply baby powder to the areas where you tend to chafe. Since chafing is caused by the rubbing of skin against skin or skin against fabric, wear clothing that fits snugly without binding.

## The hazard: Blisters

**Treat it:** Cover a blister with a bandage and let it heal naturally, which could take a few weeks. If the blister is preventing you from wearing shoes or walking, Dr. Kristan says you can gently puncture it with a sterilized needle (sterilize the needle by holding it over an open flame for 10 seconds

and then wiping it with isopropyl alcohol), then apply an antibiotic ointment such as Neosporin and a Band-Aid. "Keep it clean, and watch for swelling and redness, which can indicate an infection," he adds.

**Prevent it:** Blisters are caused by the friction of sweaty feet rubbing against shoes or straps, so check for proper fit—shoes should hug your heel and give you room to wiggle your toes. If you wear socks, buy a pair that contain a wicking fabric, such as polypropylene. If certain areas of your feet are particularly prone to blisters, cover them with a Band-Aid or moleskin before heading out.

## The hazard: Nasal Allergies (Hay Fever)

**Treat it:** Over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants can help treat a stuffy or runny nose, irritated eyes and scratchy throat, but they can be sedating. "If your symptoms are disruptive, see your doctor for a long-lasting antihistamine that doesn't cause drowsiness," says Dr. Kristan.

**Prevent it:** Avoid dust, dander, pollen and cigarette smoke, which can exacerbate your symptoms. Stay inside on high-pollen-count days—you can learn the local pollen count at [pollen.com](http://pollen.com)—and use an air purifier at home, especially in your bedroom.

## The hazard: Heat Exhaustion and Heat Stroke

**Treat it:** If you get extremely hot and tired while working, playing, exercising or just being outdoors, drink water or a sports drink immediately, get to a cool place, and rest. If you vomit and have difficulty thinking, as well as a high temperature, but no sweating, see a doctor immediately.

**Prevent it:** Stay well hydrated. Your body needs ample fluids to sweat and cool off effectively. Exercise early in the morning or in the evening when the temperature is mild. Wear light, loose clothing and avoid overexerting yourself at all on very hot and humid days, says Dr. Kristan.

## The hazard: Prickly Heat

**Treat it:** Keep areas affected by this fine bumpy rash as dry as possible to speed the healing, applying powder if necessary, suggests Dr. Kristan. You can use calamine lotion to relieve the itching, but it may delay the healing process.

**Prevent it:** On very hot days, remain indoors with the air conditioner on. If you must go outside, stay dry by wearing loose, light clothing and applying baby powder to areas prone to prickly heat, including the armpits, under the breasts, between the thighs, in the crooks of the elbows and knees and around the waist.

## The hazard: Poison Ivy, Oak and Sumac

**Treat it:** Cold compresses, over-the-counter antihistamines such as Benadryl and topical creams such as hydrocortisone can help ease the itching and burning. Avoid scratching, not only to keep the rash from spreading to other parts of your body, but to minimize irritation and prevent infection. Call your doctor if you develop swelling around the eyes or the rash gets increasingly worse.

**Prevent it:** Wear long pants when hiking, and learn to identify the offending plants. For pictures and descriptions, go to [poisonivy.aesir.com](http://poisonivy.aesir.com). If you accidentally come into contact with any of the poisonous plants, wash your skin immediately with soap and water and gently pat dry.

## The hazard: Athlete's Foot

**Treat it:** Use over-the-counter antifungal powders and creams to relieve itching and clear up the rash. Dr. Kristan recommends using the medication for several days after the rash disappears to be sure the fungus is gone.

**Prevent it:** Wear flip-flops when showering at the gym or pool to avoid bacteria. Let feet breathe by wearing clean cotton socks and going barefoot at home. Also be sure to wash your feet daily and dry them completely, particularly between the toes. ■