



“Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer’s day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time.”

- Sir John Lebbcock

## Staying Safe and Healthy Over the Summer

*This edition of Wellness Monthly features some helpful summertime health and safety reminders.*

Many Americans pride themselves on their work ethic. It’s also important to weigh the benefits of a break from work.

Continuous work can cause fatigue, decrease cognitive function, and contribute to accidents and injuries. A summer vacation supports work-life balance, which is critical to well-being. Time off allows you to rest, rejuvenate, and spend quality time with friends and family members. Even a short break can improve physical and mental health, help prevent burnout, and boost productivity and job satisfaction upon return to work.

However, a recent [ResumeBuilder.com survey](#) of employees in corporate settings found that a significant percentage of employees don’t use all of their paid-time-off (PTO) days. Reasons cited for not taking PTO included anxiety about requesting days off, saving time for a “rainy day,” concerns about not appearing hardworking and fear of being laid off.

**Recommendations:** If you have PTO, use it to take a complete break. For example, don’t check email, send work-related texts, attend virtual meetings or answer work-related calls unless it’s essential. If you don’t have paid leave and/or you work multiple jobs to make ends meet, consider requesting at least a few extra days off in combination with your regular days off. A short vacation will likely pay dividends in terms of better health and lower medical costs over time.

### Heat Illness Prevention

Awareness about ways to prevent heat illness is increasing along with the frequency of extreme-heat events. Common preventive measures include drinking plenty of water (or beverages with electrolytes when sweating); wearing sunscreen, a hat and light-weight clothing; avoiding overexertion on hot and humid days; and resting in a cool place. It’s important to respond immediately to symptoms of heat stress such as hot, red or damp skin, fast pulse, headache, dizziness, nausea or confusion by seeking shelter, hydrating and cooling the skin with damp cloths.

Certain medications can exacerbate heat stress symptoms when they interfere with the body’s ability to sweat, self-regulate temperature or maintain fluid balance. Examples include some antidepressants, antihistamines used to treat allergies and allergic reactions, stimulants such as amphetamines, beta-blockers and ACE inhibitors used to treat high blood pressure, diuretics (water pills), thyroid hormone replacements and antipsychotic medications. (Refer to this related [WorkCare Fact Sheet](#).)

**Recommendations:** Before leaving home, check the forecast and plan accordingly. Take extra precautions on high heat index days, when you are on or near water, or you are physically exerting yourself. Check with your doctor if you are taking medications that could make you more vulnerable to heat illness. Always have fresh water available and use the buddy system. Heat illness can quickly become a life-threatening situation.

## Other Tips

### First Aid

- For scrapes and cuts, apply firm pressure to the wound; you may need to elevate the injured area. Cleanse with antibacterial soap or solution and rinse in tepid tap water. Apply non-prescription anti-bacterial ointment and cover with a dry, sterile bandage.
- For mild burns, wash gently with antiseptic or cleanser and thoroughly dry the affected area. Apply cold compresses and cover with a dry, sterile dressing. An over-the-counter pain reliever may be taken at non-prescription strength.
- For skin rashes that are a reaction to an irritant, use a non-prescription, non-drowsy antihistamine and over-the counter cream or ointment.
- If you strain your back, take an over-the-counter analgesic and/or a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medication as directed. Apply an ice pack for 15 to 20 minutes three times per day. After 72 hours, a hot soak or shower may provide relief. Keep moving.

### Water Recreation

To prevent injuries and drowning, authorities recommend that you:

- Follow boating, skiing, rafting, canoeing and kayaking safety rules.
- Have both adults and children wear life vests.
- Be aware of submerged hazards, rip tides, swift currents and cold temperatures.

- Check water quality in spas, swimming pools and natural bodies of water.
- Cover open wounds with a waterproof bandage when swimming.
- Wrap up in a towel or blanket after swimming in cold water to rewarm your body.

### Insect Bites and Stings

Insect bites and stings are a relatively common summertime occurrence. Symptoms can range from mild local itchiness to life-threatening systemic reactions. In an emergency, first responders may administer CPR, an EpiPen® and/or Benadryl®. In non-emergency situations, apply ice and elevate the affected area. Over-the-counter remedies such as non-prescription antibiotic ointment, hydrocortisone cream or analgesics may be used to reduce pain and inflammation. Antihistamines help relieve itchiness.

### Poisonous Plants

Irritants, toxins and allergic compounds in poisonous plants pose a health risk in natural settings, on pet fur, and when ingested or inhaled. Wear protective clothing and avoid contact. If you suspect exposure, clean your skin with rubbing alcohol, cleansers or soap and cool water. For skin irritation, apply a wet compress, calamine lotion or non-prescription hydrocortisone cream. Get immediate medical care for severe reactions.

### Foodborne Illness

Over the summer there are opportunities to prepare and eat meals outdoors. Illness occurs when you consume food or beverages containing toxins, bacteria, viruses or parasites. Properly prepared cold foods should be stored at 40°F or lower and hot foods at 140°F or higher to reduce the risk of contamination. When transporting food, carry it in insulated coolers or warmers. Food should be discarded after two hours when it has been sitting outside in the “danger zone” (40-140°F).

Planning ahead and taking health-and-safety precautions when you are on outings helps ensure summertime fun.