

## What can I do to avoid or reduce the problems caused by hyperthermia?

### Beforehand:

- Read the weather forecast – is this run/race wise in these conditions? It is your decision to enter a race, not that of the Race Organiser.
- Do not attempt a route beyond your physical and technical ability.
- Know the route and know the area.
- Know where more water can be found.
- Plan routes you can use to get off the hill safely and quickly if necessary.
- Avoid excess alcohol beforehand.
- Consider installing the “OS Locate” app or equivalent on your mobile to provide your location immediately in an emergency.
- Consider registering with the emergency 999 SMS service at [emergencysms.net](http://emergencysms.net).

### On the day of the run / race:

- Dress appropriately (e.g. light-coloured, loose clothing). Consider a sunhat.
- Carry appropriate foods to replace salt loss.
- Carry and drink plenty of cold fluids to prevent dehydration. Take an extra bottle on long races, especially if there is little water on the route.
- Use streams and other water sources to douse skin and clothes (including hat).
- Pace yourself: it is much better to start slowly.
- Keep an eye on your fellow runners, and be prepared to stop and help if necessary.
- Know how to summon help – via a marshal, or by phone (including the emergency text service).
- Know any emergency numbers for contacting the Race Organiser.

### Getting help

- Summon help using your whistle to give the emergency signal – six blasts repeated every minute. Ignore any three blast replies – keep blowing the whistle until help arrives.
- Remember a text may get through when a call won't, and a text will keep trying after someone loses consciousness.
- Know your position as accurately as possible, and relay it with your race number either directly to a marshal or via another runner (write it down, if you can – include your phone number, if you have one).

### But, if you do have to summon a Mountain Rescue Team yourself ...

- Dial 112 or 999 (you can text if your phone is registered to the 999 SMS text service – see left).
- Ask for Police, then ask the Police for Mountain Rescue.
- Tell them where you are, ideally with a full grid reference including the letters – the operator may be miles away! Cross-check with an app if possible – see left.
- Tell them the number of casualties and the problems (injuries, hyperthermia etc). If you suspect heatstroke, tell them: it's a serious condition.
- Tell them the numbers of any other phones in your party.
- Keep your phone switched on and stay by it.

To learn more about hyperthermia, see Ian Winterburn's article in The Fellrunner #124 (summer 2019), pp32-35, or on Ian's website: [everythingoutdoors.co.uk](http://everythingoutdoors.co.uk) (under Resources).



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# Hyperthermia

(HEAT EXHAUSTION AND HEATSTROKE)

*How to avoid it – and  
what to do if you get it*



COVER PHOTO: Martin O'Brien (Stainland Lions RC) at the Denby Dash 2019, taken by Steve Frith

# Signs, symptoms and treatment

## What is hyperthermia?

Hyperthermia is the medical term for the body getting too hot to a point where it is unable to cool itself down. Unless prompt action is taken the body can overheat dangerously.

**Unchecked, this condition can be fatal.**

There are two types of hyperthermia: heat exhaustion and heatstroke. Both are dangerous, with heatstroke being the more dangerous, and it's important we can recognise the different symptoms.

## Why is hyperthermia a problem for fell runners?

Many fell races take place over remote, open ground with no shade and few, if any, water sources. On a hot day, this can easily lead to runners overheating, and this has led to hospitalisations in FRA races.

**The onset of hyperthermia can be rapid: prevention through preparation is far better than treatment.** You must know the route, check the conditions and prepare accordingly.

*See overleaf for how to prevent hyperthermia.*

## What needs to be done by/for a runner suffering from hyperthermia?

General principles:

- **Get help** — use your whistle!
- Find shade and/or cold water.
- Keep casualty cool and hydrate if conscious.
- Don't put yourself at risk: one casualty is enough.
- What is actually possible will depend on the state and location of the casualty.

## Notification/getting help is essential.

- Do not try to evacuate any unconscious or partially conscious casualty yourself.
- Keep the casualty cool and maintain an airway.
- Wait for the rescue team.

## HEAT EXHAUSTION

- Faint/dizzy, mild headache
- **EXCESSIVE SWEATING**
- Clammy skin
- Temp of 38°C or above
- Rapid WEAK pulse
- Vomiting or nausea
- Loss of appetite but still thirsty
- Muscle cramps

## Treatment

- Remove from sun — use any available shade, even a boulder or ditch
- Soak with cold water if possible, e.g. using a nearby stream or pond
- Apply cold compress to head and neck; consider cold packs at armpits and neck (*on the fells, improvise by soaking garments*)
- Lay the casualty down and raise the feet
- Give cool fluids (electrolytes)
- Recovery should occur within 30 minutes

**If not, treat as heatstroke**

## HEATSTROKE (the more serious)

- Bad headache
- **NO SWEATING**
- Red, hot, dry skin
- Temp of 40°C or above
- Rapid STRONG pulse
- Vomiting or nausea
- Possible loss of consciousness or fit  
*(if so, place in safe airway position (recovery position))*

## Treatment

**Seek emergency help**

**If in any doubt always call 999**

- Attempt to cool down and continue to do so until help arrives
- Move to shade, remove excess clothing
- Pour cold water over casualty
- Fan if possible, etc

## Recognise and react to early signs of overheating.

It can take experience and a brave decision not to continue if you start getting too hot and very thirsty, but it's worth considering the potential consequences if you don't make that decision.

If you have to ask whether to push on in a race the answer is probably 'no'. There is always next year.