

The Heat Of The Moment

Contributed by Administrator
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I hate to admit, but the heat has gotten to me a little earlier than usual this year.

So far this spring and summer, Austin has had something to the effect of 32+ days over 100 degrees. The typical annual average? Eleven. Holy Heatwave, Batman, this has been one hot summer thus far - and we're barely past the solstice!

With that in mind, I thought it would be appropriate to post a few thoughts about the heat - and, specifically, training in these dastardly conditions.

During exercise, the human body generates heat. This becomes a problem when it's already trying to work within the hot and (oftentimes) humid climate of Texas. The human body has a number of different ways to get rid of heat - some of which are more effective than others.

One of the ways to dissipate heat was something that I became acutely aware of when I moved here from Canada. I moved in August 1990, so you can imagine how my body responded to the sudden change in climate. It felt like I was sweating non-stop for the first two weeks as my body slowly became acclimatized to the conditions. Evaporative cooling is one way in which the body will cool itself. The body produces sweat - hot water - which we want to move away from the body. This can be accomplished by evaporation (into the atmosphere around us) or with fabrics next to the body (like CoolMax, DriFit, etc) to help "wick" the hot water away from us.

The problem is ... (simister music in the background) ... the humidity. The problem becomes not just the temperature, but more specifically the heat index - a combined effect of heat and humidity. As the humidity rises, the air has greater water content - which, unfortunately, more closely resembles the hot water coming from our bodies via sweating. With the decreased gradient/difference between moisture in the air and moisture on the body, there is a diminished effect of cooling. It's almost like running around with a blanket over your shoulders!

So what do we do to optimize the situation - if at all possible?

The first and foremost option is to make sure that you are well-hydrated. This should consist of not only water during your activities, but as a daily regimen. This must then be supplemented by hydration during your activity. Though this will vary significantly from person to person, the range will typically be anywhere from 20 to 32 ounces per hour.

Of course, it's more than just "water" that will solve the challenge of training in the heat. I've posted a podcast here that includes some helpful information. Many thanks to Austin sports nutritionist Meredith Terranova for her contribution to the podcast.

Be careful out there in the sweltering conditions. Yes, it is still possible to train effectively - just moderate your efforts and hydrate well. Oh, and a cool dip into Barton Springs afterwards never hurts!

Oh and extra points if you know the band that wrote "Heat Of The Moment" ...