

Summer Running Safety

Summer means plenty of outdoor activities. For people who enjoy exercising, are looking to start a new fitness routine, or who are avid runners, this means lacing up the running shoes and heading outside for a run in the summer heat. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), more than 40 million Americans run on a regular basis – and this number increases when warmer weather arrives.

Garrett Beyer, an orthopedic PA with OSF HealthCare, offers safety tips for summer running – including mishap prevention and when to see a doctor.

“There is definitely a difference between running in the fall or spring compared to the summer, especially in Chicago. It could mean a difference of 50 or 60 degrees, which is pretty substantial as far as the amount of work that is required from your body to perform at the same level that you might have been performing at in cooler temperatures,” says Beyer.

Beyer says to be patient with yourself as you venture out for a run this summer, and you should anticipate for your pace to be slower than it might be during the cooler months. While it may be frustrating to feel like you are running at a pace that is slower than usual, it is important not to overexert yourself. Slow and steady is key, especially when your body is adjusting to the change in temperature.

Proper hydration is always a crucial part of running, but especially during the summer. Beyer advises to drink water before, during, and after your run.

“Being well-hydrated I think is probably the most important thing about trying to exercise in a hotter climate. What that looks like is drinking a glass or two of water – not right before you run, because that can upset your stomach – but maybe 20 or 30 minutes before you run to pre-hydrate yourself. And if you are going on a run longer than 30 minutes, it’s really important to make sure you have some kind of hydration to sustain you,” Beyer advises.

Another way to beat the heat is by wearing the proper attire.

“The appropriate clothing – so fabrics that are lighter in color and lighter in material. That alone will make a big difference in keeping you cool. And if you can find clothes that have ventilation or mesh, those allow more air in which will keep you cooler and allow you to perform at a higher level,” explains Beyer.

Applying sunscreen before your run is important too – and make sure you are using the [appropriate SPF](#).

In addition to these tips for running in the summer heat, it is also important to protect your muscles and joints – and to know the proper ways to help them recover. Especially when more people are venturing outdoors for a run during these months, an uptick in running-related injuries also occurs. The most common, Beyer says, are typically to the muscles and tendons. However, [stress fractures](#) can also occur.

In any case, it is important to allow your body to recover via the RICE protocol (Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation). But how do you know if you should use ice versus using heat?

“Ice is helpful because it causes your blood vessels to shrink a little bit, or constrict. So it brings in less fluid and therefore the swelling will come down. Particularly with swelling, ice is a lot better. Heat will do the opposite, so I would not recommend heat for swelling. If you know that your pain is coming from a muscular source, that would be a good time for heat because that would help dilate those blood vessels,” advises Beyer.

If you have an acute injury where you hear a pop or feel immediate pain, or if your pain is persisting even with proper recovery, Beyer says you should make an appointment with your doctor or go to the nearest emergency department. Additionally, if you are experiencing any symptoms of heat stroke or heat exhaustion after a run this summer, you should seek medical attention.

“If you’re feeling really lightheaded, if you have a severe headache, if you are throwing up or feel nauseous, if you have severe muscle cramps – those are all signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Especially when the temperatures get into the 90s and even over 100 degrees, that happens quite frequently. So make sure you are aware of those signs and if you are experiencing any of those, make sure you seek medical help immediately,” says Beyer.

Follow these safety measures to keep running-related injury or illness at bay this summer. And if you are new to running, consult with your primary care provider before venturing outside.