

Three Keys to Heat Training

By Matt Cady

Summer is coming which means hotter weather and, potentially, humidity depending on where you reside. In order to not let your training and hard work falter and to help keep you safe in the process, follow these helpful tips.

1. Heat Acclimatization: Just like any properly developed periodized training plan, heat acclimatization is a slow process and should take at least 2-4 weeks. Start slow, ease into it, and listen to your body to determine how quickly you progress. If you already have a high level of aerobic fitness it may take you less time. You can even start by sitting in a sauna, or steam room for 30 minutes a day to help the body acclimate more quickly, but exercising in the heat will still elicit greater adaptations. If you live in warmer climates, start performing your easier workouts outside in the heat. Just know that your performance will suffer so you may need longer breaks. In temperate climates, you can continue your current training but wear warmer clothes to simulate warmer temperatures. The idea is that you want to induce profuse sweating and elevate your core body temperature. Once you are comfortable training for 100 minutes, continue for 1-2 more weeks. That being said, you want to replicate the stressors of your

event or activity to your heat acclimatization. So if your preparing for a 5k you may not need to be comfortable training in the heat for 100 minutes. If your training consists of hard days and easier days, i.e. prepping for a race, consider the “hot training workouts” as your hard training days because it will have a similar effect on the body.

2. Hydration: Staying properly hydrated is always important and minimal changes can affect performance. As little as 1% fluid loss can decrease your aerobic endurance and 3% can decrease your muscular endurance. Hydration in the heat is particularly critical because you will be sweating profusely and losing more electrolytes. A good way to test it is weighing yourself before and after workouts. For every pound lost, you need to drink 16-24oz of fluid. This fluid can be some combination of water or sports drinks containing electrolytes, carbohydrates, and protein depending on how intense your workout was and how much you sweat. Use your urine color as a helpful guide too. If it looks like lemonade you’re hydrated and doing well. If it looks like apple juice you probably should stop your workout and hydrate.

If you are training in the heat for longer than 90 minutes you need to schedule your hydration because your thirst



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mechanism may not be sufficient to keep you hydrated. A guideline to follow is 4-10oz every 15-20 minutes. Hydrating with sports drinks is not necessary for shorter, less intense training sessions (under 90 minutes), but is recommended for longer, hotter, more intense sessions due to the loss of electrolytes. If you only hydrate with water but continue to train, sweat, and lose electrolytes (notably sodium) you could risk hyponatremia.

3. Other tactics and methods: This third category will entail other options for adapting and training in the heat. The first being your clothing. Wear light colored and loose-fitting clothing. The light colors will reflect the sun vs. dark colors that will absorb it. Loose clothing will enhance the sweat mechanism vs. tight clothes or, contrary to popular belief, going shirtless. Clothing including SPF protection is also a good idea to help protect you from the harmful UVA and UVB rays; as is using a non-greasy, breathable sunscreen on exposed skin. A breathable hat such as a mesh backed trucker hat to not only help protect your face and eyes, but also allow your head to expel heat is a good idea.

Consuming cold, slushy water can also help the body cool and is particularly beneficial in hot, humid climates lacking wind. Adding wet, chilled clothing such as neck gaitors, arm sleeves, or compression shorts to areas of the body containing big arteries, carotid in the neck, brachial and radial in the arms, femoral in the upper legs, can be an additional cooling stimulus. Similar to light colored, loose-fitting clothing, light and airy shoes should be worn if possible. This will help the feet breathe and stay dry. Hot, wet feet are a recipe for blisters. Lastly, as with hydration, you need to fuel properly too; and, since your body will be working harder you may need extra nutrients and more calories than normal.

Training in the heat can be difficult, but if you follow some precautions it has many beneficial qualities. Some of the benefits include, but are not limited to, improved thermoregulation and a decrease in core body temperature, improved cardiovascular fitness, decreased blood lactate, and an increase in the amount of force your muscles can produce. Now, go get after it! 🏃



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Matt has been in strength and conditioning since 2005. He started with the University of Denver under Mike Sanders with a team that won the Men's Hockey National Championship. He continued his work at Miami University training athletes and went on to the 7th special forces group with Army Green Berets. His athletes have won championships, reached the highest professional ranks, and had successes with various selection courses. He now trains youth athletes in MI helping them achieve their athletic goals.

Matt's certifications include:
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