



Health Advice

Climate change and health

Staying healthy despite the summer heat: 7 tips for the workplace

All over the globe, the effects of climate change are becoming harder to ignore: temperatures are getting warmer, extreme weather events like storms, torrential rain and heatwaves are growing more frequent, drinking water is becoming scarce in many regions, and the food supply is becoming less secure. This has an impact on our health and well-being, because these changing weather conditions can cause new health problems or exacerbate existing conditions.

What heat does to our bodies

If we are going to stay healthy, we not only need to do more for the climate – we also have to adjust to the new climate conditions. At our latitude, this particularly means dealing with long heatwaves in the summer, conditions that can be a real burden as we work and go about our daily lives. Heatwaves are when the temperature rises above 30 degrees on multiple consecutive days and the nights remain tropically warm, i.e. the temperature does not fall below 20 degrees. And while many people consider sunny summer days to be the most beautiful time of the year, this heat can put a huge strain on the body. When we are subjected to high temperatures during the day and denied the chance to recover at night because things do not cool down, we run the danger of calf cramps or swollen legs, while existing cardiovascular ailments may arise or grow worse, leading to such typical symptoms as dizziness, headaches or fatigue.

Longer, hotter summers also mean that we are subjected to higher levels of UV radiation. People whose bodies are overburdened or who do not drink enough liquids run the risk of heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Hot days can also worsen the spread of some infectious diseases – not to mention causing skin cancer or eye damage.

How best to manage hot summer days at work

So what can we do for our health? In addition to the many little things that each and every one of us can do to help combat global warming, we can also do something to help our own personal health. Here are 7 tips to help you get through hot summer days while you are working.

1. Keep your workplace as cool as possible. Ideally you should air out the premises in the early morning hours and then keep the windows closed thereafter. Lowering blinds or awnings offers additional protection against the heat outside.
2. Another good idea: wear light, loose-fitting clothing made of cotton, linen or silk, for example. It is also a good idea to wear lightweight clothing that covers the skin when working outdoors. And don't forget headwear, sunglasses and sun protection with a high sun protection factor (SPF).
3. You should also keep an eye on your colleagues, because not everyone is equally able to withstand the heat. For people suffering from severe heat, warning signs may include cold or damp skin, low blood pressure, dizziness or vomiting.
4. Be sure to drink enough water or unsweetened teas – at least two to three litres a day. Make sure you keep a drinking bottle handy where you work, and see to it that your beverages are not too cold.
5. Do not eat heavy meals if possible, instead consuming smaller amounts more frequently. It might even be possible to order smaller portions in your canteen! The best things for hot weather are fresh and cool foods with a high water content, such as fruit, vegetables, salads or lukewarm soups.
6. Fans offer a great way to circulate the air and make it more pleasant – if these cannot be used in your workplace, a hand-held fan can also help.
7. Spend your break time in shady places whenever possible. Another good idea: run cool water over your wrists and lower arms – this is extremely refreshing!