

Safety Corner



This month's safety article is based upon the very real dangers the high temperatures we normally experience can create, as well as the unfortunate experiences of one of our members, Rick Hendricks. To be sure, there is no intent to embarrass Rick in any fashion, but rather to use his experience as a learning event for all of us.

It really doesn't make much difference what your definition of hot weather is, and certainly there will be some disagreement on what exactly that is. Nonetheless, if you are out for a prolonged ride of several hours or more in high temperatures, you have elevated your risk factor in an environment certainly capable of creating a condition referred to as dehydration.

Proper hydration is an ongoing and cumulative process and you cannot properly hydrate yourself without consuming appropriate levels of water. Looking at it another way, if you are under-hydrated on a given day and don't fulfill your body's need, and the following day you again fail to consume enough water, then this loss of hydration becomes cumulative and the deficit grows, making you more susceptible to dehydration. Go out and ride your bike on a hot dry day for an extended period of time, and you immediately are at an heightened risk of dehydration. To stay adequately hydrated do not wait until immediately before the ride to begin an intake of fluids. While everyone is different, there is an excellent rule of thumb for being adequately hydrated and that is, take your weight, divide it by two and that is the number of ounces you should intake daily to maintain adequate hydration. Also, fluid intake should not include caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, sodas or any other beverage containing caffeine, as these actually have the opposite effect and will exacerbate the situation.

Dehydration can manifest itself in one or more of several ways, such as *cramping* in your legs or abdomen. This is an effect that several of us encountered on our recent trip to Rolling Thunder in DC, however at the time we did not put two and two together. Fortunately however, we changed our hydration routine the following day by including sports beverages which contain electrolytes and we did not encounter any further episodes. Interestingly enough, it was only after I heard of Rick's situation and began to research this topic that I realized what had happened to several of our group...

The next symptom is *heat exhaustion*, but let me clarify this right now; you do not necessarily have to physically feel cramping for you to experience heat exhaustion. Common symptoms that your dehydration is approaching a danger point is dark yellow urine; you are no longer sweating, nausea, headaches, weakness, dizziness, confusion and or temporary loss of consciousness. Let me emphasize this, these are not symptoms that you would want to experience while you are riding your bike, and obviously they are very capable of compromising your ability to maintain control of your bike. These are some of the symptoms that Rick experienced late in his ride to Ohio. Fortunately for him, the temporary loss of consciousness and extreme weakness occurred after his arrival at his destination.



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The last symptom you might encounter in a case of extreme dehydration is heat stroke. This is an extremely serious condition requiring immediate medical care and quite possibly hospitalization. The body's core temperature must be brought down immediately. Given the severity of the situation, you may not want to wait until medical help arrives, but rather immediately take steps to get the individual's temperature down. Obviously lowering someone's core temperature will be dictated by what you have at your disposal, however; some suggestions are, getting the individual out of the heat, into air-conditioning if possible, using a wet cool towel, or even getting them into a cool body of water. In Rick's case, he collapsed in the front yard and was cooled down in part by sprinklers, however; hospitalization was necessary to receive intravenous fluids to rehydrate his body. In very severe cases, the kidneys can shut down permanently damaging them and in extreme cases death can result. An important point to keep in mind is that if any of these symptoms arise, stop riding and take the appropriate action to mitigate the concern. Don't be that guy that rides on and ignores dangerous warning signs.

The most important lesson to take from this is to take the necessary steps to avoid the consequences of extreme dehydration and here are some ways to accomplish that:



- Dress appropriately; wear protective clothing including a helmet, long pants, and a lightweight jacket to minimize your exposed skin heating up and contributing to an increasing core body temperature.
- Use a hydration backpack such as those used by our military in Afghanistan. These can hold upwards to 100 oz of water and can be used to hydrate you as you ride.
- Wear a cooling bandana or towel around your neck.
- Try out some of the new head gear from Harley Davidson that has Polyacrylate crystals built into the new line of items. As with other like items, this is soaked in water for a specified period of time and it cools as the water evaporates.
- Avoid riding during the hottest parts of the day.
- Take frequent breaks and make sure you hydrate especially if you don't have the means to do so while riding.
- Obtain a mountable cup or thermos caddy that can put fluids within easy reach.
- Wear sunscreen.
- Certain jackets marketed by Harley Davidson contain interior pockets designed for a "Hydration Pack" which cools you down as water evaporates. These packs contain Polyacrylate crystals that absorb and hold water to keep rider cool in high temperatures. The packs are usually soaked in cool water between for a designated time before being placed in the pocket designed for them.

Supplement water intake with a sports drink which helps in replacing minerals such as sodium, potassium, carbohydrates and electrolytes.

As always, practice safe riding, have fun, understand the health risks involved and don't fall victim to the perils of dehydration. If at all possible ride in the cooler times of the day.

