

## Environmental Considerations

In today's Army, soldiers may deploy anywhere in the world. They may go into the tropical heat of Central America, the deserts of the Middle East, the frozen tundra of Alaska, or the rolling hills of Western Europe. Each environment presents unique problems concerning soldiers' physical performance. Furthermore, physical exertion in extreme environments can be life-threatening. While recognizing such problems is important, preventing them is even more important. This requires an understanding of the environmental factors which affect physical performance and how the body responds to those factors.

### Temperature Regulation

The body constantly produces heat, especially during exercise. To maintain a constant normal temperature, it must pass this heat on to the environment. Life-threatening circumstances can develop if the body becomes too hot or too cold. Body temperature must be maintained within fairly narrow limits, usually between 74 and 110 degrees Fahrenheit. However, hypothermia and heat injuries can occur within much narrower limits. Therefore, extreme temperatures can have a devastating effect on the body's ability to control its temperature.

Overheating is a serious threat to health and physical performance. During exercise, the body can produce heat at a rate 10 to 20 times greater than during rest. To survive, it must get rid of the excess heat.

The four ways in which the body can gain or lose heat are the following:

- Conduction-the transference of heat from a warm object to a cool one that is touching it. (Warming boots by putting them on is an example.)
- Convection-the transfer of heat by circulation or movement of air. (Using a fan on a hot day is an example.)
- Radiation-the transfer of heat by electromagnetic waves. (Sitting under a heat lamp is an example.)
- Evaporation- the transfer of heat by changing a liquid into a gas. (Evaporating sweat cooling the skin is an example.)

Heat moves from warm to cool areas. During exercise, when the body is extremely warm, heat can be lost by a combination of the four methods. Sweating, however, is the body's most important means for heat loss, especially during exercise. Any condition that slows or blocks the transfer of heat from the body by evaporation causes heat storage which results in an increase in body temperature.

The degree to which evaporative cooling occurs is also directly related to the air's relative humidity (a measure of the amount of water vapor in the air). When the relative humidity is 100 percent, the air is completely saturated at its temperature. No more water can evaporate into the surrounding air. As a result, sweat does not evaporate, no cooling effect takes place, and the body temperature increases. This causes even more sweating. During exercise in the heat, sweat rates of up to two quarts per hour are not uncommon.

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If the lost fluids are not replaced, dehydration can occur. This condition, in turn, can result in severe heat injuries.

Thus, in hot, humid conditions when a soldier's sweat cannot evaporate, there is no cooling effect through the process of evaporation. High relative humidities combined with high temperatures can cause serious problems. Weather of this type occurs in the tropics and equatorial regions such as Central America and southern Asia. These are places where soldiers have been or could be deployed.

### **Heat Injuries and Symptoms**

The following are common types of heat injuries and their symptoms.

- Heat cramps-muscles cramps of the abdomen, legs, or arms.
- Heat exhaustion-headache, excessive sweating, dizziness, nausea, clammy skin.
- Heat stroke-hot, dry skin, cessation of sweating, rapid pulse, mental confusion, unconsciousness.

*Adapting to differing environmental conditions is called acclimatization.*

To prevent heat injuries while exercising, trainers must adjust the intensity to fit the temperature and humidity. They must ensure that soldiers drink enough water before and during the exercise session. Body weight is a good gauge of hydration. If rapid weight loss occurs, dehydration should be suspected. Plain water is the best replacement fluid to use. Highly concentrated liquids such as soft drinks and those with a high sugar content may hurt the soldier's performance because they slow the absorption of water from the stomach.

To prevent heat injuries, the following hydration guidelines should be used:

- Type of drink: cool water (45 to 55 degrees F).
- Before the activity: drink 13 to 20 ounces at least 30 minutes before.
- During the activity: drink 3 to 6 ounces at 15 to 30 minute intervals.
- After the activity: drink to satisfy thirst, then drink a little more.

### **Acclimatization to Hot, Humid Environments**

Adapting to differing environmental conditions is called acclimatization. Soldiers who are newly introduced to a hot, humid climate and are moderately active in it can acclimatize in 8 to 14 days. Soldiers who are sedentary take much longer. Until they are acclimatized, soldiers are much more likely to develop heat injuries.

A soldier's ability to perform effectively in hot, humid conditions depends on both his acclimatization and level of fitness. The degree of heat stress directly depends on the relative workload. When two soldiers do the same task, the heat stress is less for the soldier who is in better physical condition, and his performance is likely to be better. Therefore, it is important to maintain high levels of fitness.

Increased temperatures and humidity cause increased heart rates. Consequently, it takes much less effort to elevate the heart rate into the training zone, but the training effect is the same. These facts underscore the need to use combat-development running

and to monitor heart rates when running, especially in hot, humid conditions.

Some important changes occur as a result of acclimatization to a hot climate. The following physical adaptations help the body cope with a hot environment

- Sweating occurs at a lower body temperature.
- Sweat production is increased.
- Blood volume is increased.
- Heart rate is less at any given work rate.

### Exercising in Cold Environments

Contrary to popular belief, there are few real dangers in exercising at temperatures well below freezing. Since the body produces large amounts of heat during exercise, it has little trouble maintaining a normal temperature. There is no danger of freezing the lungs. However, without proper precautions, hypothermia, frostbite, and dehydration can occur.

### HYPOTHERMIA

If the body's core temperature drops below normal, its ability to regulate its temperature can become impaired or lost. This condition is called hypothermia. It develops because the body cannot produce heat as fast as it is losing it. This can lead to death. The chance of a soldier becoming hypothermic is a major threat any time he is exposed to the cold.

Some symptoms of hypothermia are shivering, loss of judgment, slurred speech, drowsiness, and muscle weakness.

During exercise in the cold, people usually produce enough heat to maintain normal body temperature. As they get fatigued, however, they slow down and their bodies produce less heat. Also, people often overdress for exercise in the cold. This makes the body sweat. The sweat dampens the clothing next to the skin making it a good conductor of heat. The combination of decreased heat production and increased heat loss can cause a rapid onset of hypothermia.

Some guidelines for dressing for cold weather exercise are shown in Figure 12-1.

*Hypothermia develops when the body cannot produce heat as fast as it is losing it.*

GUIDELINES FOR DRESSING FOR EXERCISE IN THE COLD	
<p>Clothing for cold weather should protect, insulate, and ventilate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Protect by covering as large an area of the body as possible.</li> <li>● Insulation will occur by trapping air which has been warmed by the body and holding it near the skin.</li> <li>● Ventilate by allowing a two-way exchange of air through the various layers of clothing.</li> </ul> <p>Clothing should leave your body slightly cool rather than hot.</p> <p>Clothing should also be loose enough to allow movement.</p> <p>Clothing soaked with perspiration should be removed if reasonably possible.</p>	<p>40% HEAT LOSS THROUGH HEAD AND NECK WHEN UNCOVERED</p>  <p>LIGHIWEIGHT WARM-UPS (NOT WATERPROOF)</p> <p>FEET SHOULD BE KEPT DRY</p>

Figure 12-1

## FROSTBITE

Frostbite is the freezing of body tissue. It commonly occurs in body parts located away from the core and exposed to the cold such as the nose, ears, feet, hands, and skin. Severe cases of frostbite may require amputation.

Factors which lead to frostbite are cold temperatures combined with windy conditions. The wind has a great cooling effect because it causes rapid convective heat transfer from the body. For a given temperature, the higher the wind speed, the greater the cooling effect. Figure 12-2 shows how the wind can affect cooling by providing information on windchill factors.

A person's movement through the air creates an effect similar to that caused by wind. Riding a bicycle at 15

mph is the same as standing in a 15-mph wind. If, in addition, there is a 5-mph headwind, the overall effect is equivalent to a 20-mph wind. Therefore, an exercising soldier must be very cautious to avoid getting frostbite. Covering exposed parts of the body will substantially reduce the risks.

## DEHYDRATION

Dehydration can result from losing body fluids faster than they are replaced. Cold environments are often dry, and water may be limited. As a result, soldiers may in time become dehydrated. While operating in extremely cold climates, trainers should check the body weights of the soldiers regularly and encourage them to drink liquids whenever possible.

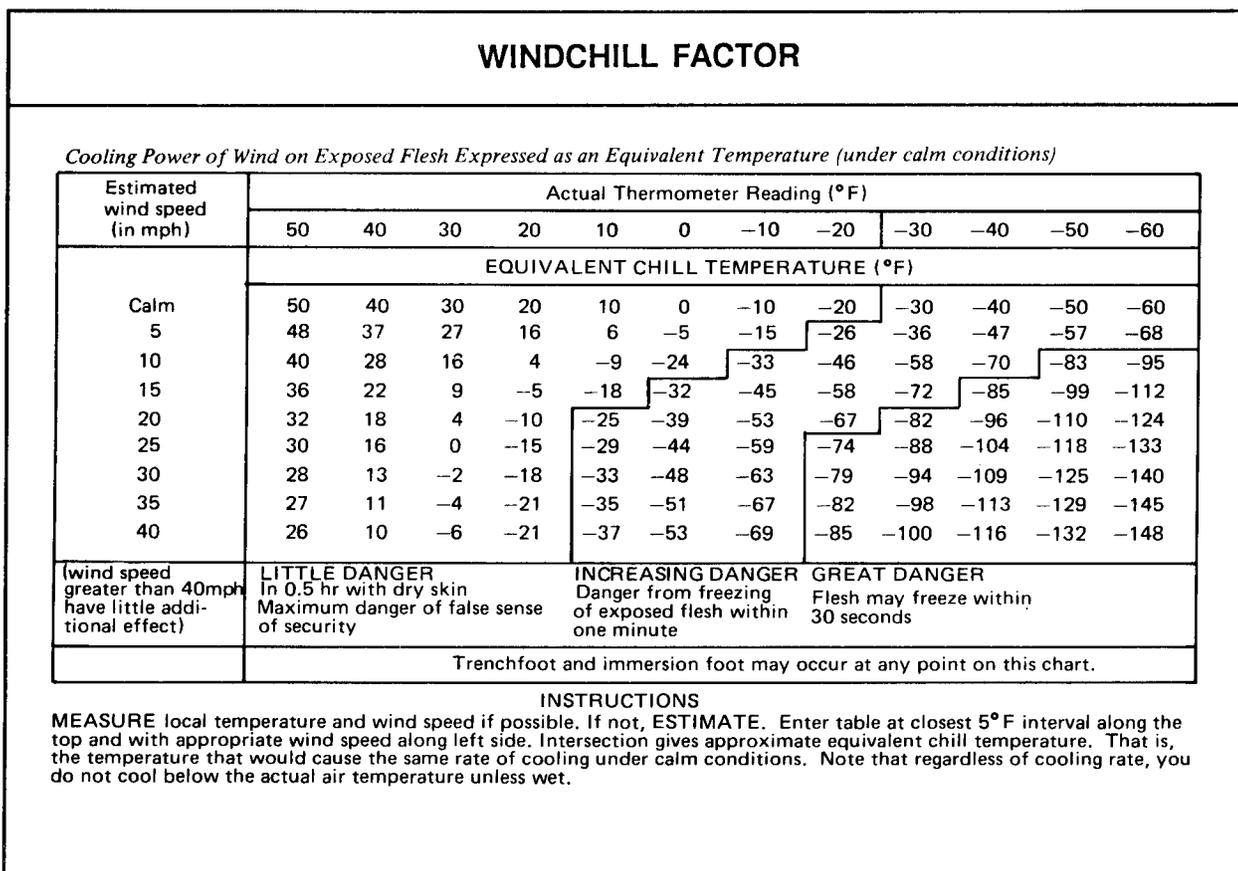


Figure 12-2

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## Acclimatization to High Altitudes

Elevations below 5,000 feet have little noticeable effect on healthy people. However, at higher elevations the atmospheric pressure is reduced, and the body tissues get less oxygen. This means that soldiers cannot work or exercise as well at high altitudes. The limiting effects of high elevation are often most pronounced in older soldiers and persons with low levels of fitness.

Due to acclimatization, the longer a soldier remains at high altitude, the better his performance becomes. Generally, however, he will not perform as well as at sea level and should not be expected to. For normal activities, the time required to acclimatize depends largely on the altitude. In order to insure that soldiers who are newly assigned to altitudes above 5,000 feet are not at a disadvantage, it is recommended that 30 days of acclimatization, including regular physical activity, be permitted before they are administered a record APFT.

Before acclimatization is complete, people at high altitudes may suffer acute mountain sickness. This includes such symptoms as headache, rapid pulse, nausea, loss of appetite, and an inability to sleep. The primary treatment is further acclimatization or returning to a lower altitude.

Once soldiers are acclimatized to altitudes above 5,000 feet, deacclimatization will occur if they spend 14 or more days at lower altitudes. For this reason, soldiers should be permitted twice the length of their absence, not to exceed 30 days, to reacclimatize before being required to take a record APFT. A period of 30 days is adequate for any given reacclimatization.

## Air Pollution and Exercise

Pollutants are substances in the environment which lower the environ-

ment's quality. Originally, air pollutants were thought to be only by-products of the industrial revolution. However, many pollutants are produced naturally. For example, volcanoes emit sulfur oxides and ash, and lightning produces ozone.

There are two classifications of air pollutants - primary and secondary. Primary pollutants are produced directly by industrial sources. These include carbon monoxide (CO), sulfur oxides (SO), hydrocarbons, and particulate (ash). Secondary pollutants are created by the primary pollutant's interaction with the environment. Examples of these include ozone (**O<sub>3</sub>**), aldehydes, and sulfates. Smog is a combination of primary and secondary pollutants.

Some pollutants have negative effects on the body. For example, carbon monoxide binds to hemoglobin in the red blood cells and reduces the amount of oxygen carried in the blood. Ozone and the oxides irritate the air passageways in the lungs, while other pollutants irritate the eyes.

When exercisers in high-pollution areas breathe through the mouth, the nasal mucosa's ability to remove impurities is bypassed, and many pollutants can be inhaled. This irritates the respiratory tract and makes the person less able to perform aerobically.

The following are some ways to deal with air pollution while exercising:

- Avoid exposure to pollutants before and during exercise, if possible.
- In areas of high ozone concentration, train early in the day and after dark.
- Avoid exercising near heavily traveled streets and highways during rush hours.
- Consult your supporting preventive-medicine activity for advice in identifying or defining training restrictions during periods of heavy air pollution.

*Pollutants can irritate the respiratory tract and make the person less able to perform aerobically.*