

## ***WHAT FACTORS LEAD TO EXERTIONAL HEAT STROKE?***

Rebecca M. Lopez, PhD, ATC, CSCS

Exertional heat stroke (EHS) is a life-threatening condition that occurs when an exercising individual's heat gain has overpowered the body's ability to dissipate heat. EHS is characterized as having a dangerously elevated body temperature (> 104°F) along with central nervous system dysfunction.<sup>1</sup> The causes of EHS are multifactorial, with a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors playing a role (Table 2-1). Examples of intrinsic factors may include fitness level and an underlying illness, while extrinsic factors may include environmental conditions or protective equipment. When an exercising individual succumbs to EHS, it is often the result of several of these factors, and not one single predisposing factor. Although EHS may not always be preventable, being aware of the potential causes of EHS is imperative to decreasing the risk of EHS in exercising individuals.

Knowing that EHS is not caused by one factor alone is extremely important in decreasing the risk of this potentially catastrophic condition. Understanding these predisposing factors allows athletes, coaches, and health care professionals to minimize the risk. For instance, many individuals believe that hydration alone will