



# Never mind how you pronounce it, what is ‘rhabdo’?

A trucker recently asked me about a condition with a long, hard-to-pronounce name. Some of you may be at risk for this odd-sounding but dangerous condition.

His personal family physician told him that extreme temps, unloading, overexertion when tarping a trailer, or sitting for long periods is a “recipe for something called rhabdo.” This driver asked me to explain what rhabdo is, how you know you have it, and what needs to be done right away.

## ANSWER

Rhabdomyolysis, “rhabdo” for short and pronounced rab-doe, can be a serious life-threatening condition that has a variety of causes.

Truckers are not prone to contract this condition and rhabdo is not specific to hot weather, but there is a risk.

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The cause of rhabdomyolysis is related to muscle damage – severe damage – which causes the muscle fibers to leak, or release a protein pigment called myoglobin. Myoglobin release can cause acute kidney injury.

So, what causes it and how do you know you have it?

Rhabdo occurs most commonly following trauma to the muscle. This can be overexertion or a crush-type injury.



Having heat exhaustion or a heat stroke is likely the top contributing factor for a trucker to develop rhabdo during these blazing summer days. Here’s an example: Truckers may in one day drive from a hot humid area – losing body water through sweating – to a hot dry area with no sweat due to evaporation.

If the body water is not replaced, then your body begins to use its cellular reserve. If not replaced, then the body reacts and you get thirsty. By this point a driver, depending on health status and conditioning, can lose up to 2-3 gallons of water. Thirst alone is not the best indicator of dehydration. When thirst presents, dehydration is already present.

Symptoms include dark, reddish urine, a decreased amount of urine, weakness, and muscle aches and swelling.

These are indications you may want to write yourself an Rx for rhabdomyolysis and possible incapacitation.

Fluid must be replaced slowly and continuously (by mouth) when thirst starts. Drink 600 ml every 15-20 minutes. That’s about 2.5 cups. Use cool water, and truckers should have water handy whenever traveling. Note: no ice-cold drinks,

no hot drinks, and absolutely no energy drinks or sugary drinks.

My experience with rhabdo (during hot weather) is mostly from trauma, embolization from being in one position, and overexertion creating heat stroke. The latter is from dehydration in truckers who are taking medications and exerting themselves repeatedly during the day without staying hydrated.

### What are some risk factors:

- Heat stroke (meaning you’ve had one)
- Medications
- Infection
- Trauma (crush injuries, soft tissue swelling)
- Alcohol use, especially during hot weather
- Metabolic disorders
- Illicit drug use
- Infection
- Age and mobility

As you can see, most of these may not be a causation issue in most truckers. However, the ones who are at risk need to heed the risk factors – especially as related to excessive exertion during hot weather.

Rhabdomyolysis is an end-stage condition that can be fatal if not prevented or treated very aggressively. By aggressive treatment, I mean hospitalization. **LL**

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