

## Hot Weather Safety Tips for Older Adults

Hot weather can be dangerous, especially for older adults. Every summer, nearly 200 Americans die of health problems caused by high heat and humidity—and most of them are 50 or older. Hot weather is more likely to cause health problems for older adults for a number of reasons. Physical changes that happen with age make older people less likely to notice when they feel hot, even when outside temperatures are high. They also can't cool down as quickly or as well as younger people. Older adults are also less likely to feel thirsty, which means they're more likely to become dehydrated (a loss of too much water in your body). Heart disease, diabetes and other chronic diseases common in later life also increase risks of heat-related problems. So do some medicines prescribed for these and other health problems, and many over-the-counter drugs. Some of the medicines that may have these side effects are water pills, allergy and sinus pills, and nerve medications.

### Staying Safe When It's Too Darn Hot

90°

**When temperatures climb above 90 degrees F (Fahrenheit), older adults need to take precautions. So check the outside temperature on summer days. If it's above 90 degrees, older people should:**

**SPEND AS MUCH TIME AS POSSIBLE INSIDE** with the air conditioning on. If you don't have an air conditioner, go somewhere that is air-conditioned, such as a shopping mall, library, senior center, or movie theatre. Fans can't provide enough cooling if the temperature is in the 90s or higher. **NOTE:** The federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps adults 65 and older who have limited incomes cover the cost of air conditioners and utility bills. To reach your state's LIHEAP program, call the toll-free number for your state's energy services office. You can find your state's number on the computer at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/liheap/grantees/states.html>.

#### ■ STAY OUT OF THE SUN

whenever you can, and wear loose, light-colored clothes (dark-colored clothes absorb heat) and a lightweight, broad-brimmed hat when you must go out. That will help you both stay cool and avoid sunburn. Being sunburned can also make it harder for your body to cool off. Use "broad spectrum" sunscreen with sun protection factor (SPF) 15 or higher.

#### ■ WAIT UNTIL THE SUN IS GOING DOWN, or until early

the next morning—when it's cooler—to go for a walk or do demanding activities such as yard work.

■ **DRINK PLENTY OF COOL WATER,** clear juices, and other liquids that don't contain alcohol or caffeine. Alcohol and caffeine can dehydrate you ("dry you out").

■ **TAKE TEPID (NOT TOO COLD OR TOO HOT) SHOWERS, BATHS,** or sponge baths when you're feeling warm. Or wet washcloths or towels with cool water and put them on your wrists, ankles, armpits, and neck. This will also cool you down.

## How to Spot and Treat Health Problems Caused by Heat

It's important to recognize when hot weather is making you sick, and get help. Here's a list of health problems caused by too much heat, and how to recognize and treat them:

### Dehydration

**WHAT IT IS:** A loss of water in your body. It can be serious if not treated.

**WARNING SIGNS:** Weakness, headache, muscle cramps, dizziness, confusion, and passing out.

**WHAT TO DO:** Call your healthcare provider or 911. Meanwhile, drink plenty of water and, if possible, "sports drinks" such as Gatorade™, which contain important salts called "electrolytes." Among other things, electrolytes play a key role in regulating your heartbeat. Your body loses electrolytes when you're dehydrated.

### Heat stroke

**WHAT IT IS:** A very dangerous rise in your body temperature. It can be deadly.

**WARNING SIGNS:** A body temperature of 103 or higher; red, hot, and dry skin; a fast pulse; headache; dizziness; nausea or vomiting; confusion; and passing out.

**WHAT TO DO:** Call 911 immediately. Move to a cool, shady place, take off or loosen heavy clothes. If possible, douse yourself with cool water, or put cloths soaked with cool water on your wrists, ankles, armpits, and neck to lower your temperature. Try and see if you can safely swallow water or drinks such as Gatorade. **Note:** If you are caring for someone else who has heat stroke, only give them water or drinks if they are awake and can swallow.

### Heat exhaustion

**WHAT IT IS:** A serious health problem caused by too much heat and dehydration. If not treated, it may lead to heat stroke (see above).

**WARNING SIGNS:** Heavy sweating or no sweating, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, paleness, cold or clammy skin, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting, fast and weak pulse, fainting.

**WHAT TO DO:** Without delay, move to a cool, shady place, and drink plenty of cool fluids, such as water or Gatorade. Call 911 without delay if you have high blood pressure or heart problems, or if you don't feel better quickly after moving to the shade and drinking liquids.

### Heat syncope

**WHAT IT IS:** Fainting caused by high temperatures

**WARNING SIGNS:** Dizziness or fainting.

**WHAT TO DO:** Lie down and put your feet up, and drink plenty of water and cool fluids such as Gatorade.

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*DISCLAIMER:* This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other healthcare provider. Always consult your healthcare provider about your medications, symptoms, and health problems.  
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From the Office of:

Phone Number:

Patient Name:

Notes:

Your Next Appointment: