

BEAT THE HEAT: PROTECT YOURSELF WHEN THE WEATHER GETS HOT

As an older adult, very hot weather can be dangerous to your health, especially if you have pre-existing health conditions. This fact sheet provides information about how to stay healthy through the summer months. It's a good idea to talk to your doctor about how hot weather will affect you, especially if:

You have breathing difficulties

You have heart problems

You suffer from hypertension

You have kidney problems

You have Parkinson's disease

You have mental illness, such as depression or dementia

You are taking medications for these or other conditions

WHAT IS HEAT ILLNESS?

Heat illness is suffering heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat fainting, heat edema (swelling of your hands or feet), heat rash, and heat cramps. These can come on fast and are mainly caused by over-exposure to heat. If not prevented, heat illness can lead to serious health issues or even death.

Here are some things you can do to protect your health in hot weather:

Be prepared:

Take note of local weather forecasts and know when hot weather is coming. Arrange for regular visits by family members, friends, or neighbours in case you need assistance. If you have an air conditioner, make sure it's in working order before the heat starts. If you don't have an air conditioner, find a cool spot close by such as a mall, a community centre, a library, or a place of worship where you can cool off for a few hours.

Be aware of how you feel:

If you're in a hot environment pay attention to how your body feels. Watch for symptoms of heat illness, like headache, nausea, dizziness or feeling faint, rapid heartbeat, dry mouth, or decreased urination. If you experience any of these symptoms, move to a cool area right away and drink cool liquids.

Drink lots of water:

During hot weather it's important to drink plenty of water before you start to feel thirsty. This decreases your risk of getting dehydrated. You can remember to stay hydrated by leaving a water glass by the sink, flavouring water, or eating more fruits or vegetables because they have a high water content.

Keep yourself cool:

Try to wear loose-fitting clothing made of breathable fabric and stay in the shade as much as possible. Keep your home cool by using an air conditioner, even a window box unit. These can be set at an even temperature throughout the day and night to help with energy costs. You can also block the sun from coming into your home with blinds or awnings. Try to prepare meals that don't require the oven, and take cool baths or showers to help cool off. Go to air conditioned places, like malls or community centres, if your home is warm.

Avoid exposure to heat when you go outside:

Try to reschedule or plan activities for cooler parts of the day – typically evening or early morning. Check the weather reports for humidity levels and air quality before heading out, because these can impact your ability to withstand heat. Remember that shaded areas like parks can be as much as five degrees cooler than surrounding areas!

Heat stroke is a medical emergency. Seek medical care immediately if you or someone you're with is over-heated and feeling nauseous, confused, has suddenly stopped sweating, or has lost consciousness. While waiting for help, try to cool the affected person down right away by moving into a cool place if you can, or by applying cold water to large parts of the skin or clothing if possible.

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