



## ***Hot Weather Safety Tips for Older Adults***

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**Hot weather is more likely to cause health problems in older adults than in younger ones.** About 200 Americans die of health problems caused by high heat and humidity every year. And most of them are 50 or older. Thanks to some of the physical changes that happen as we age, older adults can't cool down as well as younger ones. Just as important - older people may not *feel* hot when the temperature is dangerously high. They are also less likely to feel thirsty, even when they are almost dehydrated, which means that their bodies have lost dangerous amounts of water. Heart disease, diabetes and some other diseases that are common among older adults can make it even more likely that they'll have problems when it's hot. So can certain drugs, including water pills, allergy and sinus medications, and drugs for depression and nerve problems.

### **Staying safe when it's hot outside**

High temperatures can and do cause health problems in older adults. When it's hot older adults:

- **Should** turn on the air conditioner or go where it's air-conditioned—a shopping mall, grocery store, senior center, movie theatre, museum, or library. (Fans aren't enough.)
- **Should Not** walk long distances, lift heavy objects, or do other strenuous things.
- **Should** drink lots of water and other clear drinks that don't contain alcohol or caffeine (these can "dry you out").
- Remember: If your urine is a light yellow color, you're drinking enough water. If it's darker yellow, you need to drink more.
- **Should** take cool showers, baths, or sponge baths.
- **Should** wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. A good choice is clothing made of natural fabrics like cotton.
- **Should** wear hats.
- **Should** stay out of the sun.

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

It's important to recognize when hot weather is making you sick, and to get help. Here's a list of health problems caused by heat, and what you need to know about them:

### **Dehydration**

**What it is:** A loss of water in your body; this can be deadly.

**Warning signs:** Weakness, headache, muscle cramps, dizziness, confusion, and passing out.

**What to do:** Call your doctor or 911. Meanwhile, drink plenty of water and, if possible, "sports drinks" such as Gatorade, which contain important salts called "electrolytes" that your body loses when you're dehydrated.

### **Heat stroke**

**What it is:** A very dangerous rise in your body temperature; it can be deadly, too.

**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, drink water or drinks such as Gatorade. If possible, douse yourself with cool water, or use cold, wet compresses to help lower your body temperature.

### **Heat exhaustion**

**What it is:** Illness caused by too much heat and dehydration

**Warning signs:** Heavy sweating or no sweating, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, paleness, cold or clammy skin, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting, and fainting.

**What to do:** Without delay, move to a cool, shady place, and drink plenty of cool fluids, such as water, or drinks such as Gatorade. If you don't feel better fast, call 911.

### **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.

*Source: the American Geriatrics Society*



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# Dehydration

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Dehydration is caused by the excessive loss of water and salts from the body due to illness or from prolonged exposure to heat. The Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio reminds older adults that severe dehydration can easily become a life-threatening condition for them. Certain medications can cause the body to lose water, and, if not replenished, can accelerate the onset of dehydration

## **Causes:**

- Severe sweating
- Extreme heat
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting

## **Preventing Dehydration:**

- Avoid coffee or alcoholic beverages, they can increase dehydration
- Don't wait until thirsty, drink plenty of fluids throughout the day, especially water
- Avoid being outside during the intense sunlight hours from 10 am to 3 pm

## **What to look for:**

- Thirst
- Dry skin
- Fatigue
- Light-headedness
- Confusion
- Dry mouth (and mucous membranes)
- Increased heart rate
- Increased breathing rate
- Less frequent urination

## **Treatment:**

- Move to a cool and dry place
- Lie down and rest
- Apply cool water to the skin, reapply often
- Drink fluids such as water, juice, or sports drinks (like Gatorade)



# Heat Exhaustion

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Heat exhaustion is a non-life-threatening condition caused by the excessive loss of water and salts from the body due to prolonged exposure to extreme heat. The Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio reminds older adults and their caregivers that continued heat exposure may lead to heat stroke, which *is* life-threatening. Older adults are highly susceptible to heat exhaustion.

## Causes:

- Prolonged exposure to extreme heat
- Loss of body water and salts - usually through sweating
- Not drinking enough fluids

## Preventing Heat Exhaustion:

- Limit outdoor activities during extreme heat, especially during the intense sunlight hours from 10 am to 3 pm
- Wear light-colored clothes and hat - they reflect heat from the sun
- Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day such as water, or juice
- Avoid caffeine and alcoholic beverages - they accelerate the effects of heat exhaustion

## What to look for:

- Headache
- Blurred vision
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Vomiting
- Sluggishness or fatigue
- Thirst
- Profuse sweating
- Moderate increase in body temperature

## Treatment:

- **If the person is showing signs of heat stroke call 911 immediately!**
- Then, move the person to a cool and dry place
- Have the person lie down and rest
- Apply cool water to skin and reapply often
- Fan the wet skin
- Have person drink fluids such as water, or juice
- Apply ice to head, neck, armpits and groin areas



# Heat Stroke

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Heat stroke is a life-threatening condition. The Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio reminds older adults to seek immediate medical attention if you or someone you know is suffering from heat stroke. Heat stroke occurs when the body cannot cool itself, usually by sweating and the internal (core) temperature of the body becomes too high. Older adults are highly susceptible to heat stroke.

## Causes:

- The inability of the body to cool itself after prolonged exposure to extreme heat

## Preventing Heat Stroke:

- Limit outdoor activities during extreme heat, especially during the intense sunlight hours from 10 am to 3 pm
- Wear light-colored clothes and hat - they reflect heat from the sun
- Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day such as water, or juice
- Avoid caffeine and alcoholic beverages - they accelerate the effects of heat stroke

## What to look for:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Disorientation, agitation or confusion
- Sluggishness or fatigue
- Seizures
- Hot dry skin
- Increased body (inner) temperature
- Loss of consciousness
- Rapid heart beat
- Hallucinations

## Treatment:

- **Call 911 immediately - heat stroke can be deadly!**
- Then, move the person to a cool and dry place
- Apply cool water to skin and reapply often
- Fan the wet skin
- Apply ice to head, neck, armpits and groin areas

