

Keeping cool in a heat wave

Summer is usually enjoyable but **very high temperatures and humidity can present a risk to health** and older people are particularly susceptible to heat-related illness.

See inside to find out how to **protect yourself from the heat**, how to **recognise heat-related illness** and what to do when someone shows signs of it.

Action points

- If you are **concerned about your health during a heat wave** contact your GP, pharmacist or NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.
- If you live alone **consider asking a relative or friend to visit or phone to check that you are not having difficulties** during periods of extreme heat.
- If you know a neighbour who lives alone, **check they are ok.**



Avoiding heat-related illness

- **Keep out of the heat.** Stay indoors during the hottest time of the day: late morning to mid afternoon. If you do go out, wear a hat and stay in the shade as much as you can.
- If you are travelling by car or public transport **always take a bottle of water.**
- **Avoid strenuous activity** and limit chores like housework and gardening to the early morning or evening when it's cooler.
- **When indoors try to spend most time in the coolest parts of your home.** Keep curtains and blinds closed in rooms that catch the sun. Remember that lights generate heat. Keep windows shut while it's cooler inside than out and open them when it gets hotter inside. If it is safe, you could leave windows open at night when it is cooler. Fans can help sweat evaporate but do not cool the air itself.
- **Wear loose, lightweight, light-coloured cotton clothing.**
- **Take cool baths or showers.**
- **Splash your face with cold water** or try placing a damp cloth or scarf on the back of your neck to help you cool off.
- **Drink lots of fluid** even if you are not thirsty. Vary your drinks – water, fruit juice, tea and coffee are fine – but avoid alcoholic drinks as they can make dehydration worse.
- **Eat normally but try to have more cold foods,** particularly salads and fruit as they contain a lot of water.

Dehydration and overheating

Extreme heat and humidity can cause you to dehydrate and overheat.

Watch how you feel: look out particularly for **muscle cramps in your arms, legs or stomach, mild confusion, weakness or sleep problems.** If you have any of these, rest in a cool place and drink fluids. Seek medical advice if your symptoms persist or worsen.

Heat exhaustion and heatstroke

The symptoms of heat exhaustion include headaches, dizziness, nausea or vomiting, pale skin, heavy sweating and high temperature.

If you have any of these symptoms you must:

- move to a cooler place and loosen tight clothes
- drink plenty of water or fruit juice
- sponge yourself with cold water or have a cool shower.

If this is difficult or your symptoms persist for several hours, seek medical advice.

Heatstroke can develop if heat exhaustion is left untreated but it can also develop suddenly without warning.

The symptoms of heatstroke include hot and red skin, headaches, nausea, intense thirst, raised temperature, confusion, aggression and loss of consciousness.

Heatstroke is a life-threatening condition. So if you or someone else has the symptoms of heatstroke:

- **call 999 immediately** or 112 if you are in the European Union (you can call 112 from a mobile for free)
- while waiting for the ambulance, follow the advice given above for heat exhaustion but **do not try to give fluids to anyone who is unconscious.**

Further information

- If you have **breathing problems or a heart condition** you may find your symptoms get worse when it is very hot. Contact your GP for advice.
- If a **heat wave is on its way or the weather is hot for several days**, listen to local radio so that you know the latest local advice. Check for weather forecasts and temperature warnings on TV and radio. You can also get weather information from www.metoffice.gov.uk
- For **advice about heat-related illness** call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or visit the NHS Choices website at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

How Age Concern can help

The Age Concern Information Line and website offer a wide range of information on issues affecting older people. Call us on 0800 00 99 66 (free call) or visit www.ageconcern.org.uk

Contact details for your local Age Concern may be in the box below. If not, call the Age Concern Information Line on 0800 00 99 66 (free call).

Code: ACIL21 (first revised edition) Date of publication: May 2009 © Age UK 2009

Age Concern is a federation of registered charities. Age Concern England (charity number 261794) has merged with Help the Aged (charity number 272786) to form Age UK, a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England: registered office address 207–221 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9UZ, company number 6825798, registered charity number 1128267. Age Concern and Help the Aged are brands of Age UK. The three national Age Concerns in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have also merged with Help the Aged in these nations to form three registered charities: Age Scotland, Age NI, Age Cymru.