



Hot Weather Safety Tips for Older Adults

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