



Keeping Hydrated

Hot weather can have a dire effect on senior health because the aging body has a harder time regulating its internal temperature. Do you know what steps to take to avoid overheating?

Getting Older, Staying Sharp

Scorching temperatures across the nation — have led to heat advisories and warnings in many cities in the Midwest, South, and East. Too much heat can be dangerous at any age, but as you get older, your body has an even harder time dealing with extreme heat, putting you at a higher risk of overheating and heat stroke. You can reduce this risk by taking a few steps to protect your health when the weather is hot.

Why Overheating Is More Common in Seniors

Your brain sends special signals to your body when it begins to overheat. The signals prompt your body to release hormones that cause you to sweat. Think of sweating as your body's central air-conditioning system, cooling you down both at the skin surface and internally as your body temperature decreases. But sometimes it gets too hot for this cooling mechanism to work, and it can become less efficient as you get older. A number of factors can put you at higher risk of overheating as you age, including:

- Decreased blood circulation
- Sweat glands that have become inefficient
- Weakness or fever due to age-related illness (such as heart, lung, or kidney disease)
- A salt-restricted diet for high blood pressure
- Certain medications (such as heart and blood pressure drugs, sedatives, and tranquilizers)
- Lifestyle factors that range from living in a hot home and overdressing to lack of transportation
- Being over or underweight



Knowing When Your Body Is Overheating

It's important to recognize symptoms of overheating as soon as possible. Heat-related illnesses range from muscle cramps, swelling, and dizziness to more serious problems such as heat exhaustion. The most severe outcome of overheating is heat stroke, a potentially life-threatening condition that may require emergency medical attention.

Symptoms of overheating may include:

- Sudden dizziness
- Thirst
- Headache
- Nausea
- Muscle spasms
- Cramps in your abdomen, arms, or legs
- Fatigue
- Swelling in your ankles
- Lack of coordination
- Cold, clammy skin

If you or someone you're with has any of the following signs or symptoms, you may have heat stroke and you should seek emergency medical care immediately:

- High body temperature (over 104°F)
- Confusion
- Changes in behavior
- Fainting or feeling like you're going to faint
- Staggering
- Strong, rapid pulse *or* slow, weak pulse
- Dry skin
- Flushed skin
- Lack of sweating despite the heat
- Coma



How to Keep From Getting Overheated

Take these steps to reduce your risk of overheating when the weather is warm.

- **Listen to the weather forecast:** Pay close attention to local weather reports, especially in the summer months, so that you know when it's too hot to go outside.
- **Stay in to stay cool.** When the weather is hot and humid, and when an air pollution alert is in effect, stay in a cool, air-conditioned environment.
- **Keep your home cool.** If your house or apartment doesn't have air-conditioning or fans, keep it as cool as possible in other ways:
 - **Open your windows at night.**
 - **Open windows across the room from each other to create circulation (cross-ventilation).**
 - **Cover windows that are in direct sunlight, pull curtains shut, and close blinds in the heat of the day.**
- **Avoid exercising in the heat.** Exercise indoors on hot days; if you want to exercise outdoors, wait until the weather cools down and never work out in the heat of the day.
- **Dress appropriately.** On warm days, wear cool, light-colored clothes made of natural fabrics like cotton.
- **Drink plenty of liquids.** Increase your intake of water, fruit juices, vegetable juices, and other hydrating liquids on hot days.
- **Avoid caffeine and alcohol.** Caffeine and alcohol act as diuretics and cause your body to lose fluids, so limit these beverages, especially when the weather is warm.

Warmth can be welcoming, especially when you have aches and pains in your joints, but you need to protect yourself against the dangerous effects of hot weather. When it comes to hot weather, too much of a good thing can become a senior health hazard.